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“A STEP ASIDE.”

“A STEP ASIDE,”

BY

GWENDOLEN DOUGLAS GALTON

(MRS. TRENCH GASCOIGNE),

AUTHOR OF “LA FENTON.”

“O ye wha are sae gude yoursel’,
Sae pious and sae holy,
Ye’ve nought to do but mark and tell
Your neebor’s fauts and folly !

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman ;
Tho’ they may gang a kennin wrang,
To Step Aside is human.”—BURNS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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"I DEDICATE THIS STORY TO


My Father,

IN MOST AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE

OF

ALL HIS KIND INTEREST

IN MY WORK."



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A STEP ASIDE.



CHAPTER I.

PALAZZO RICASOLI was *en fête*. Lights streamed from the windows, and the soft strains of a band floated in dulcet cadence down the broad, stately staircase, and welcomed the arriving guests. The *crème de la crème* of Florentine society were assembled in those spacious magnificent apartments, where costly bric-a-brac, perfumed exotics, and delicate hued draperies made a fit background to the fair company who were grouped in gay and social converse.

The Devereux's had returned from San Giovanni a few days previously, and were among the bidden guests. Nancy's one happy

delightful week was over ; the fortnight had sped, and yet she had had no tidings of Lord Bingley. She was in a feverish state of misery, every bell which rang, every post which came, sent a horrible apprehension to her heart.

Guy had returned with them to Florence, but he had made the excuse that the villa was too far off for sight-seeing, and he consequently had installed himself at a hotel in the town.

Nancy had not seen him since their return ; she wondered if he would come to-night ; she dreaded, and yet she yearned to see him. A moment later, and her suspense was at an end, as he walked slowly into the room. She felt, rather than saw him shake hands with Olive. She felt, rather than saw, that he was pale, and nervous, and that he whispered something quickly to Sir Eustace, and then took him into a corner, where they remained for some time.

Nancy thought that she caught the words, "dreadful, terrible end," but at that moment

she was whirled off to dance, and heard no more. She danced madly to-night. The motion seemed to relieve the weight at her heart, and the excitement made her forget her fears, though her eyes still watched the door with nervous dread, but as each guest arrived, and Lord Bingley was not among them, a sense of security came over her, and she felt almost content, till her eyes met Guy's with their cold yet pitiful expression. He had not spoken to her, but what need was there for speech? She knew that he accused her of being a hard, selfish flirt, and she could not refute the stigma; she would never be able to tell him that it was untrue, all her life he would despise her, hate her, and how was she to bear it?

She gave him one beseeching glance, but he turned coldly away, and a fierce pang shot through her heart. She whispered to her partner, "Come, let us dance; why do

we stand here? Let us dance all the time?"

"Signorina, you are very energetic," he replied. "One would almost think that you desire to run away from some one, for we never cease dancing for one minute."

"I would run away from myself," murmured the girl under her breath, "from my own thoughts," and they whirled round and round till the music ended, and they were obliged to stop.

"Come out on to the balcony," she said, restlessly, "it is stifling in here."

He bowed, and they walked slowly through a beautiful cinque-cento room, out on to a large *loggia*, which overlooked the garden, and from which the scent of roses floated up. The sky was tinted to the softest modulations of blue, and the stars hung like lamps in the glistening firmament.

Two figures stood in the shadow conversing

in low tones, but Nancy heeded them not. She sank into a low chair, and fanned herself feverishly, and then made a sudden dart at a lucciola, as it flitted by.

“Catch it for me!” she cried pettishly to her partner, a young Italian, who had worshipped very humbly at her shrine for the last two months.

“Do you know what a lucciola means, Signorina?” he inquired eagerly; “will you really accept it from my hands?”

Before she could answer the two figures had moved out of the shadow, and a stream of light from the open window fell full upon the nearest one, and Nancy saw that it was Guy. She did not answer the Italian’s question, she sat motionless: her fan dropped to the ground with a little thud, and the lucciola floated away.

He came up to her, and, bending down, he whispered hoarsely in her ear, “Have mercy upon him. Is not the breaking of one heart

sufficient for you? ” and he walked silently on into the house.

* * * * *

Olive looked passing fair to-night in the palest chartreuse coloured gown. Her hair was caught up and arranged high upon her head, and a delicate tiara of diamonds crowned those golden tresses.

The Florentines admired Lady Devereux's beauty, but they complained that she was cold, not “sympatica” like the Signorina Nancy. She was too serious for them, too much imbued with certain odd English ideas of conventionality. But, notwithstanding, the men hung around her; they like to gaze on that perfect face and figure, and with the love of the “impossible” they strove to awake a flash from her eyes, and call up a flush on her cheeks. She sat surrounded by a little court, who vied with each other for a smile or a glance.

Sir Eustace stood in a door-way, silent and alone. His arms were folded upon his breast, and his face betrayed the unrest of his soul. He was angry at seeing his wife thus surrounded. Why should other men feast their eyes on her charms, when she belonged to him alone? His face was dark, and he scowled at the little group.

“Look at the marito of Lady Devereux!” exclaimed a laughing voice near to him “Dio mio! how fierce he looks! Quite Othello like. Thank goodness Guiseppe is not jealous, and does not watch me like that. Poverina! I am sorry for her,” and the speaker passed on.

Sir Eustace ground his teeth with rage, as he listened to the careless words. He knew that his conduct was ridiculous; if he could only take a dispassionate view of himself, how absurd it would seem.

He began to move away, but as he turned

to go, Corio went up to Olive, and, bending over her whispered, "Just un tour de waltz, Signora, only one."

She refused at first, but the Italian's face of disappointment touched her, and she rose slowly and put her hand upon his arm. She brushed against her husband as she passed through the door-way, and a few loose hairs touched his face, but she did not perceive him, and a moment more she was whirled into the throng of merry dancers. Sir Eustace stood gazing at them, as they floated round the room, their figures swaying gently to the rhythmical measure of the waltz, and their feet chasing each other on the shining parquet.

"Charming scene!" exclaimed a voice in his ear, and Mr. Gairs put his hand familiarly on Sir Eustace's shoulder, "but I guess you don't look real festive and well pleased this evening. Don't care about seeing that handsome wife of yours dancing with the Marchese

Corio ; eh ? dangerous man, no doubt ; all Italians are dangerous."

Sir Eustace moved angrily away, without answering.

Olive and Corio had stopped dancing, and he was fanning her gently, and whispering something, and she was laughing gaily.

"Do you know," exclaimed Mr. Gairs, following Sir Eustace, "this ball reminds me of one at Brisbane just after I was engaged to Rose Maynard, and she made me mad with jealousy. I stood in the doorway just as you are doing, and—"

Sir Eustace expressed a very uncomplimentary wish concerning Mr. Gairs, and Brisbane, and then he pushed rudely past the American, and walked out on to the balcony.

Was that name ever to ring in his ears ? He leant on the balustrade, and muttered an oath under his breath. Was it for this that he had sacrificed truth and honour ? For this

that he had chosen the broad path of sin? He covered his face with his hands; he wanted to shut out the sight of Olive floating round in that willowy dance. He longed to stifle Mr. Gair's words, but it was useless.

The nightingale in the garden below seemed to sing them in long tremulous cadence, and the strains of the band wove them into the swinging measure. He had given up all for happiness, and yet that beautifully plumaged bird eluded his touch. It sang him some sweet lay, and enticed him on, away from the path of duty, and then left him in the shadow of death.

Was there no way of entrapping that will o' the wisp? Was there no way of gaining happiness? Only one—and that—Sir Eustace bent his head lower, and listened, for the answer seemed to be spoken to him by some unseen voice. The words pierced his heart. “Those who would possess me must lose self

in the interests and joys of others," and he had thought only of his own unlawful wishes and desires, only of his present delight, not of the possible dark future which might be in store for Olive. He had sacrificed the woman he loved for his own selfish passion. He forgot even his jealousy in those awful thoughts.

How long he stood there he knew not, it might have been five minutes, or it might have been a hundred years ; but he was aroused from his reverie by a low sob near to him ; and as his eyes pierced the darkness, he beheld a little white figure crouching in the shadow. He went softly up to it, and then started as he recognized Nancy.

"What is the matter?" he asked tenderly, "Why are you here all alone? Are you ill?"

"No," she whispered, "not ill, only ever so miserable."

She could not restrain herself; the words came unbidden from her lips.

“Miserable,” he repeated; “what is your trouble? Tell me about it, child,” and he put his hand gently upon hers.

“Fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,” and Sir Eustace was touched by Nancy’s woe-begone little face. She choked back the tears which rose at his words, she must tell him; she could bear this terrible secret no longer. Since Guy’s cruel words, she had sat there alone. She had told her partners that she was faint and tired, and that she wished to rest. And there she remained nursing her misery; in the distance she heard the ringing laughter, and the buzz of happy voices mingling with those joyous strains which sounded to her like a dreary funeral dirge.

“Why are you miserable?” repeated Sir Eustace, “tell me, Nancy, and let me help you.”

“Because, because—but you cannot help me; no one can help me, and it is all my own fault. It is about—about—”

“Signorina, I have been looking for you everywhere,” cried Corio, stepping suddenly out on to the loggia. “The cotillon is just going to commence.”

Nancy tried to forge an excuse, but no lie being ready, she rose mechanically, and walked with Corio into the house.

Sir Eustace’s eyes followed her; what was her trouble? Could she have heard about—?”

“Will these chairs do, Signorina?” inquired Corio, “I thought that you would prefer the front row, it is more amusing.”

Nancy acquiesced and glanced behind at a dark unknown man and woman who were sitting there, and then a shiver passed through her, as she perceived Guy standing a few paces off. Why had she come so close to him? She longed to fly, but it was too late.

The cotillon began, and Nancy found herself chosen out for one or two figures, whirled round the room, and again deposited in her place. She sat listlessly, gazing at the other people; she was not obliged to talk, as Corio was occupied in helping to lead the cotillon, and so left her a good deal to herself. She sat listening aimlessly to the conversation of the dark man and woman behind her.

At first it was not particularly interesting, but at length a name caught her ear, which rivetted her attention, and sent a thrill of terror to her heart. The dark man said,

“You have heard about Lord Bingley, I suppose? Quite a tragic fate, the boat was capsized and found floating bottom up.”

Nancy turned suddenly, and encountered Guy's eyes fixed upon her. She saw that he too was listening; her heart beat to suffocation. “Tragic story,” “Boat capsized.” What could it mean?

“Signorina, will you accept these roses?” said a voice close to her, and before she could refuse, a glorious bouquet was thrust into her hand, and she was whirled again into the mazy throng.

When she returned to her seat the woman was saying :

“It is terrible, but is it quite certain that he is drowned?”

Nancy sat petrified, she could not move. There was a moment’s pause in the dance, while fresh flowers were being brought. She watched the men enter the room bearing long sticks, over which hung the most ravishing boas composed of flowers.

Even at that moment no detail escaped her ; she saw the deep pink carnations nestling against the lilies of the valley, while another boa of dark pansies shaded into one of pale lilac. The room looked like fairy-land ; baskets and bouquets of flowers were thrown upon the

ground in abandoned profusion. Roses and lilies decked the fair company, and while they danced, the delicate garlands, which were wound round their necks, floated out like gay pennons as they rushed swiftly through the air.

“Could it be suicide?” inquired the dark woman. A boa of pink carnations was thrown about Nancy’s neck, and Corio said,

“You will give me one turn, Signorina.”

As one in a dream, she felt herself borne again into the mazy dance. As one in a dream, she found herself again in her seat, with the scent of the flowers rising around her. Should she ever smell that subtle perfume, without thinking of that awful moment?

“You say it was not suicide?” the dark woman was repeating in a hard, conventional voice, as Nancy returned to her place, “But it looks odd, and at Monte Carlo too,” and Nancy felt that the woman was looking volumes.

“They say,” replied the man, lowering his voice, “that he was trying to escape.”

“Escape!” exclaimed the lady for once startled out of her conventional society voice; “and why?”

“Because” replied the man in a half whisper, “he had forged a cheque!”

Nancy uttered a faint cry of horror, but it was so low that no one heard it, excepting Guy, who looked at her white drawn face with rage and misery in his heart. She must love this man to make her look like that. Then it was true she had only been flirting with him, and he had been fool enough to believe in her. He could not bear the sight of her agonized countenance, and he walked quickly towards the door.

Nancy longed to call him back, but she felt like one in some ghastly nightmare, who struggles to move or speak, but is bound by some unknown force. As he passed Sir

Eustace, she saw him stop and say something, and then he strode on, and was lost to her view.

Lord Bingley dead. The words drove themselves into her heart with desperate, overwhelming force. Dead—dead! The strains of Straus's valse seemed to take up the refrain, and repeat it higher and higher, and the voices of the people seemed to shriek it till it became one awful roaring discord. Her brain was on fire, a rush of many voices swept through her ears, and then came black awful darkness.

* * * * *

When she regained consciousness, she was lying on her bed at the Villa delle Rose. The room was dark, except for a shaded candle, and one struggling ray of daylight, which had crept in through the green Persiennes.

Olive was seated near to the bed, tenderly bathing her brow.

“What has happened?” Nancy whispered,
“Have I been ill?”

“Hush, dear, you must not talk. I will tell you all when you are stronger. You fainted at the ball; try and sleep again;” and she smoothed the pillows gently.

“I cannot sleep,” exclaimed Nancy, excitedly,
“I must know. I remember something of what happened. It was in the cotillon, they were giving boas of flowers,—such flowers,” she murmured dreamily—“lilies and lilac and carnations, and Corio had put one round my neck, when some one said that it was suicide. Whose suicide was it? I cannot remember,” and then a flush rose to her cheek, and she grasped Olive’s hand convulsively, and asked,

“Was it Lord Bingley? Tell me quick. I recollect they said that he was drowned. The boat was found floating bottom upwards, “and she stopped exhausted; and then she went on breathlessly,

“They said, I remember it all now, that he was trying to escape, because—” and she stopped and faltered—“because he had forged a cheque,” and she sank back, white and trembling.

Olive put her arms about her little sister, and said in her calm, sweet voice,

“Nancy, dear, it is true, quite true;” and then she continued, “If you will promise to be still, I will tell you the dreadful details, but first tell me one thing, my dearest. Tell me that you did not love this man. I have been so much to blame, Nancy; I have been so selfish, so wrapped up in my own great happiness, that I have seen nothing outside it. I have left you too much alone, thrown you carelessly into Lord Bingley’s company; can you forgive me, darling?”

Nancy threw her arms round her sister’s neck, and drew her head down close to hers, and then she whispered all the terrible story

of her engagement. Olive's face grew dark with anger.

"How could he dare to frighten you like that? But child," and her voice quivered with emotion, "why did you not tell me about it?"

"Because," and Nancy hesitated, and toyed nervously with the white coverlet, "because, you see, Olive, your ideas of honour are so high and—and—well I thought you would blame me, for, you see, it was my fault at first. I did flirt with him at Dinglehurst. I thought I loved him there, but,—well you see I found that I did not, it was all a mistake."

The tears rushed to Olive's eyes.

"Child, why did you think me so hard?" she said. "But it has been my own fault," she continued bitterly, "for having been so selfish as to think only of my own happiness, and not to notice that you were suffering. Do you remember the night before my wedding?"

she continued, "when I asked you about Lord Bingley? but your words disarmed me, I thought it was only a passing flirtation."

"I should have told you then," whispered Nancy, "only Aunt Prudence came in, and interrupted us, and then you married and went away, and somehow I thought that things would right themselves. I thought that he would forget me, and that I should never really have to marry him. And then, when he came out here, I tried to tell you, but you were always with Eustace, and somehow I seemed so far away from you; you seemed to have got into another world, and to have left me behind."

"Nancy!" exclaimed Olive, in a broken voice, "I can never forgive myself. My little sister, I ought to have taken more care of you. It is I who have brought this trouble upon you; what can you think of me?"

"No," returned Nancy shaking her head; "No; it was not your fault, Olive; it was all

my own. I never thought about the future. You see when I am happy and amused, I never can think of anything but the present moment, and this has been my punishment—and an awful punishment, but it is over now; he is dead, you say, dead”—she repeated. “I cannot believe it yet, are you quite sure, tell me how it happened.”

Olive took the little trembling hands in hers, and began slowly to repeat the terrible circumstance,—

“The day that we started for San Giovanni, Lord Bingley, it appears, went to Monte Carlo.”

“Yes,” put in Nancy; “he told me that he was going.”

“He had been playing very high at the Club here,” continued Olive, “and he had lost a great deal of money. Before going to Monte Carlo, he wrote a cheque for a large amount, and”—she stopped for a moment, and

looked at Nancy's white face—"and he forged the name of a distant cousin. He succeeded in cashing the cheque, and it was not till two days ago that the forgery was discovered, and a warrant issued for his apprehension. They imagine now that he received prior information of the discovery, as the day before the fact was made public, he went out in a small boat, and was never seen alive again. A storm came on that evening, and the next morning the boat was found floating bottom upwards near Alassio, and Lord Bingley's body was washed ashore at San Remo. Whether it was suicide, or whether he was trying to escape by rowing down the coast to Genoa, where he hoped to get on board some vessel bound for America, must ever remain a mystery."

There was a long silence—Nancy could not speak. She clasped Olive's hand tightly in hers. It was so awful; she had longed to be free, longed to get away from Lord Bingley,

and now God had given her freedom by taking him suddenly and mysteriously.

The day-light had grown bolder, and was casting long arms of light across the ceiling, and a few flickering rays danced in and out on the tiled floor. The candle had burnt very low, and at last went out with a dismal splutter. Olive leaned over Nancy; she was so quiet that she thought that she slept, and with stealthy tread she softly left the room.

Nancy lay with closed eyes; she was glad to be alone, glad to have those tender watchful eyes taken from her. She wanted to think, to realize all that she had heard. It had come so suddenly upon her that her brain could not grasp it. She opened her eyes, and gazed round the large, rather bare room. It all looked as it had done. The dressing table with its stiff white petticoat stood out ghostlike in the centre. The little iron washing-stand

filled the same modest corner, and the large exasperating chest of drawers with no handles, only a key, that always refused to open them when you were in a hurry.

There they stood, just as they had done for all those three weary months. Nothing was changed excepting herself. She was appalled at the sense of joy and elation which filled her heart. How could she be so wicked as to rejoice at Lord Bingley's death? She could not reason with herself, she was free! that blessed word seemed written all round the room. Free—only—and a cold hand seemed suddenly laid upon her heart—freedom had come too late, and she buried her face in the pillow and wept.

Olive walked sadly down upon the terrace. She had not been to bed, and her head and heart ached with fatigue and remorse. She drew in a long breath as she reached the air. It was a morning when the soft heat mists

hung over the mountains in delicate fantastic shapes, and the air was full of the sound of awakening life. The bells from the little hill-side villages were calling to each other with sonorous voices, while the roll of the mule carts, and the guttural exclamations of the drivers mingled in crude unison.

Olive walked to the end of the terrace, and gazed pensively down upon Florence. How exquisite it looked in this morning light! A little golden mist hovered round it, like the delicate threads of some gossamer veil. It looked like a phantom city rising out of a burnished, molten sea, from which the dazzling Campanile lifted its aerial form, and the Duomo was traced with sombre hue against the glorious light.

What is it about that Tuscan city which winds such tendrils of affection around our hearts. Olive felt it so strongly this morning.

The view had become her dear familiar friend. It helped her, it cheered her, it encouraged her. She had come out with such a heavy-laden heart, and now a weight seemed lifted, and a soothing peace fell upon her. She gazed at the city and then away past the golden mist up that shining thread of the Arno, on to where the pale airy outline of the Carrara mountains lay against the blue horizon.

“Olive!”

She started from her reverie, and turned to her husband.

“At last you have come,” he said. I have waited so long,” and he looked lovingly into her face.

“Is she better?” he continued.

“Yes, better, and asleep,” replied Lady Devereux, as she walked by Sir Eustace’s side down the long flight of stone steps into the garden. There they paced slowly up and

down among the orange and lemon trees, while she told him Nancy's story.

“Poor child!” he murmured. “But how could she be so foolish as to imagine that we should wish her to marry Bingley. It is really absurd, ridiculous; I thought that the girl had more sense.”

“Eustace, you forget how young she is; and it was my fault,” exclaimed Olive, “my fault. You see we have never quite understood each other,” and she laid her hand affectionately on her husband's arm. “I have been so happy that I have seen nothing beyond, outside that happiness. You have made my life so fair, that I have forgotten that there is any trouble,” and she rested her eyes on the silver, rustling olives, through which the breeze was humming.

Sir Eustace pressed the hand on his arm lovingly, and a great gladness filled his heart.

“ Will it be necessary to delay our journey on account of Nancy ? ” he asked anxiously, after a few moments’ silence. “ Will she be well enough to travel ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” replied Olive; “ she will be quite strong enough. It is the mind which is sick, not the body, and the change will do her good.”

“ That is well,” he replied, with a sigh of relief.

“ You want to go,” questioned Olive.

“ Yes, my dearest,” he said, “ I want to see you installed at ‘ The White Ladies ; ’ I want to have you in my own home ; for I feel that when you are there, you will be more really mine, and I shall have you more entirely to myself,” and he looked yearningly into her face.

Olive sighed ; it was always the same refrain, written in different keys, but the burden was the same ; that she must yield

herself more entirely to him. It was sweet to feel that his love was so strong, that he could never have enough of her, and yet—and yet—it was hard to satisfy such jealous craving for undivided supremacy.

She gathered a spray of orange-blossom from a tree near, and slowly pulled it to pieces; the white petals fluttered down one by one on to the gravel path. She felt weary of continually assuring her husband that he was her first object, that he came before all the universe. Why could he not believe her, and be satisfied? But after all, this jealousy was only a little cloud on her horizon; at present it had not really dimmed their happiness.

“I must go back to Nancy now,” she said at length, after lingering some half hour by Sir Eustace’s side, “she may wake and want me, and, Eustace, I have neglected her. In future it must not be so.”

Sir Eustace's face darkened for a minute, and then he controlled himself, and said, gently:

"Stay a little longer, Olive; it is such happiness to have you, and I have something to tell you. Something that I must tell you. I had a letter from Mr. Jones this morning."

"Mr. Jones," repeated Olive, "why did he write? Does he mention the Aunts? It is so long since Aunt Prudence has written."

"Yes," replied Sir Eustace, gravely; "his letter is entirely about them," and he handed it to her half hesitatingly, and then, before putting it into her hand, he said,

"Olive, Miss Prudence is not well."

"Not well," repeated Olive faintly, "is it serious?"

"I am afraid that it is," he replied slowly, "but read Mr. Jones' words."

She unfolded the letter quickly, and read the following :

“ Dinglehurst,
20th May.

“ DEAR SIR EUSTACE,

“ I feel that you and Lady Devereux ought to be informed of the illness of Miss Prudence Lavendercombe. Miss Hannah either does not appear to take in the gravity of her sister’s malady, or she wishes to deceive herself, and therefore she has not written to you herself. Miss Prudence had a very bad attack of cold in the winter, from which she has never entirely rallied, and on my return from a short holiday, I find her much weaker than before my departure. Her unselfishness is the cause of her not writing herself to tell you of her illness, as she could not bear to spoil your time abroad by casting any shadow over it.

“ I pray you to forgive my seeming interference in the matter, but I feel that I should not be doing right if I failed to let you know how seriously ill I think her.

“ Believe me, yours sincerely,

“ HAROLD JONES.”

The tears rushed into Olive’s eyes, as she slowly folded up the letter.

“ Why did Aunt Hannah not write ? ” she murmured. “ If she had only given us a hint. Eustace, is it not terrible ? We must go back

directly. Think of all the precious time that has gone, and I might have been with her," and the dear tender face rose up before Olive's vision, and the sunny landscape was blurred by tears.

"If I were only at home," she whispered in a broken voice, "I could be with her every day, and try and repay a little all her love and kindness to us."

Sir Eustace listened to the words with a hard, angry feeling. Was he never to have Olive to himself? Was there always to be some other call? He had pictured her at "The White Ladies" ever at his side, and now he saw that her mind was engrossed by Miss Prudence, and that she would spend all her time at the Cottage with her Aunt; and he told himself bitterly that she put every claim before his; and the jealousy returned with double force, and the fiend whispered,

“After all, you have no real legal power over her ; she is free, even to depart.”

Would the memory of that dream never leave him ? He let his wife walk away in silence ; he could not even bring himself to speak one word of sympathy, though she looked so pitifully and pleadingly into his face. He felt angry and aggrieved with Miss Prudence for being ill. His whole view was distorted, and for the moment he could not reason.

He watched Olive move slowly and dejectedly away, under the palms and oranges ; he watched her mount the steps wearily, and he saw her turn and give him one beseeching glance ere she entered the house, and then he walked fiercely away.

He wandered out of the gate, down the little steep, narrow road flanked by high walls, said to have been built by Michael Angelo, and through the small village of Ricorboli,

out on to the grand “Viale dei Colli.” He went on hardly noticing whither his steps led him. A few peasants passed him, and wondered vaguely why the Signore Inglese always looked so melancholy. By degrees the rapid motion calmed his ire; it died away and repentance and remorse rushed upon him. How bitterly he reproached himself for having allowed Olive to leave him without one little word of sympathy! How could he have borne to have seen her pleading face, and not have tried to help her.

“Oh, God!” he cried, “have you not punished me sufficiently for my sin, by making me suffer the torments of jealousy?” and he gazed up at the Paulonias, which, in their purple magnificence, waved overhead. He walked slowly on again after a minute, past San Miniato, and up to the Piazzone, where the David rose up like some colossal giant, standing in silent loneliness. He stood for a

moment under the statue, half awed by the majestic dignity of that wonderful work, and then he leaned on the parapet, and let his eyes wander over that marvellous panorama. The mist had vanished, and the mountains, the city, the Val d'Arno, lay bathed in translucent sunlight. Could he ever forget that view of Florence? The deep sapphire sky, the glistening white marble of the Duomo and Campanile, the golden thread of the Arno floating away past the green shades of the Cascine, and the mountains tinted to every shade of airy mauve and deep wistful violet. The bells were chiming the hour of nine, and the din of the city rose up like some distant echo of an unseen world.

How many hopes, vows, and resolutions have been made whilst gazing down on that historic city!

Sir Eustace felt strangely moved as he stood there; and his repentance and his resolutions

for the future were real and sincere. His own miserable jealousy sank away, and he looked with horror upon his vain senseless doubts. How he loathed himself, and his own weak nature. To be jealous of his wife's old aunt ! The idea was absolutely laughable ; it was preposterous, unexampled madness, and yet—madness or no—it was there ; and the explanation of this despicable passion—the explanation—

“ Ah ! ” Sir Eustace buried his face in his hands, and muttered, “ If she were only my wife—only my wife ! ”

CHAPTER II.

“WELL! and so you have returned to civilisation at last!” exclaimed Mrs. Lopes, as she greeted her brother. She had a greater air of prosperity about her than ever.

Mr. Lopes’ ventures on the turf had been very successful lately, and they had entertained all the royalties and lions of the season, so that Mrs. Lopes’ worldly little heart was amply satisfied, and she was quite ready to be condescending and kind to her brother, principally, it must be allowed on account of the Manor House.

She wanted to get rid of the children for the summer, and thought The Manor the most

satisfactory place for them. Of course, she reflected, relations are rather a bore in the season, when one wants to ask all one's smart friends—I mean acquaintances; but, after all, Guy was very presentable. He was so nice looking that she might invite him to meet any one. So she was quite effusive in her demonstration of affection.

“My dear boy,” she said, “you know I am so rejoiced to see you back, and so it was exaggerated about the business; it is all right again.”

“No, it was not exaggerated,” he replied, “but I hope in time to put things straight. I am going out again in the autumn.”

That was rather a bore, because she wanted the children to remain at Dinglehurst till November, but she said nothing of her plans yet. She only murmured sweetly,

“You will come and dine with us to-night, dear; we have a very nice party, and you can

go with me afterwards to Lady Damer's ball.'

Guy shook his head.

"No, thank you, Eleanor; I do not feel much in party trim; and also I hate London society. People fill their houses with seething masses of humanity. They always remind me of the man in the Bible, who gave a great supper, and who sent his servants out into the highways and hedges to compel people to come in."

Mrs. Lopes laughed.

"You are incorrigible; but this is a new phase. You used to love your fellow creatures."

"I do not feel in the humour for them now," returned Guy; "and, besides, I am off to Dinglehurst this afternoon. Miss Prudence is very ill, I had a letter from Mr. Jones at Florence, and so I came back at once."

"Poor old thing," remarked Mrs. Lopes,

serenely ; “ I am sorry. But, really, Guy, you do make such an absurd fuss about that old woman.”

“ Fuss ! ” repeated Guy, his face flushing with anger ; “ fuss about a person who has been the same as a mother to me ! Have you absolutely no feeling, Eleanor ? ” he exclaimed, sternly. “ I know that it is not the fashion to have a heart, and you were always fond of being in the fashion.”

Mrs. Lopes looked a trifle ashamed, and then changed the subject by asking airily,

“ Tell me about Florence, and Lord Bingley. Cyril wrote and told me about his death ; it is really very sad, and I hear that he was engaged to Nancy Lavendercombe. He told me that she was madly in love with him ; and I encouraged him to marry her, as much as I could, as I thought it would be such a good thing for him.”

“ And I suppose you never thought about

her," remarked Guy, in cold, stinging tones, He had walked to the window during this recital, and was gazing stonily out into the street.

"But it would have been an excellent marriage for her," replied his sister.

"Excellent marriage!" he repeated, "to such a blackguard as that?"

"But think of the position," exclaimed Mrs. Lopes; "he would have been Lord Grimworth, and Americans love a title. And, after all, my dear Guy, it is absurd to have these very moral ideas. Few men are saints, and I thought it was a lucky chance for her, and so I encouraged it as much as possible. Of course, you know, she is a nice little thing; but she is not very—well—how shall I put it—very refined. Don't you think there is always something just a little second-rate about Americans?"

Mrs. Lopes watched her brother carefully,

as she made these remarks. They were spoken with a purpose; she wished to see how deep his affection for Nancy had gone. She had been very much alarmed by his evident admiration for the girl, and she had consequently done all in her power, in a quiet, underhand way, to promote Lord Bingley's suit. She wanted her brother to make a good marriage; it would help her to climb the steep, slippery ladder of society, on which she laid such store.

Guy answered nothing. He kept his eyes rivetted on the house opposite. He thought that he knew his sister's character fairly well, but what she said about Lord Bingley and Nancy startled him considerably. He was disgusted beyond measure at her worldliness. Could she willingly hurl a girl into such a marriage for no reason that he could see, except the pleasure of match-making.

It never occurred to him that his sister was

trying to put Nancy out of his reach. He thought that his love for her had been so well concealed that no one had guessed it, except, perhaps, Miss Prudence ; and now, though his sister's words pained him unutterably, he strove not to betray his feelings. But Guy was not a good actor, he was too honest and straightforward, and Mrs. Lopes read a good deal more in his face than he was aware of.

"I suppose, as you do not answer," she continued, "you do not agree with me ; but," she added carelessly, "how stupid I am to ask you. Of course I quite forgot that you used to be one of Miss Lavendercombe's devoted admirers. Perhaps you are still?"—and she looked full at him.

A deep flush dyed Guy's bronze cheeks, and he replied, in a cold, stiff voice,

"Eleanor, I would prefer not to discuss the subject," and he rose to depart.

Mrs. Lopes was annoyed with herself, and with him, but she kissed him with much effusion, and then said in a sweet, persuasive tone,

“Guy, dear, I have a favour to ask. Would you let me send the children down to the Manor for a few weeks ? ”

“ I am sorry, Eleanor, but it is impossible this year, as I am only going to be there for a fortnight or so, and the house is shut up.”

Mrs. Lopes bit her lip, and fell to examining her nails. This really was very provoking; what was she to do with those troublesome children ?

“ Really, Guy,” she said crossly, “ I think that you might have obliged me, so far ; it is not much to ask.”

“ I am very sorry,” he replied, “ but the truth is that I cannot afford to open the Manor this year ; I am going to stay at Wilks’ farm.”

“You are really very tiresome, Guy,” she exclaimed; “you are so shortsighted to your own interests. If you had only taken my advice last year, and married Lady Gertrude Wyndham, all this ridiculous economy might have been avoided.”

“And the children would have been able to spend the summer at the Manor,” returned Guy sarcastically. He could not refrain from this thrust; his sister’s plans for herself were so obvious.

“You are very unkind,” she replied coldly. “You know that I only suggested the idea for your own sake.”

“Doubtless,” returned Guy; “but you see, Eleanor; I have got the shocking habit of liking to arrange my own matrimonial affairs. Good-bye,” and he touched her cheek with his lips, but this time she did not respond.

She only called after him,

“I hope that you do not intend to throw

yourself away on that little second-rate American girl."

Guy's heart was hot within him. He generally came away from his sister's ruffled, but to-day her words had sent daggers into his heart. It was owing to her, then, that Lord Bingley had proposed to Nancy. His own sister had ruined his chance of happiness ; her last words had opened his eyes a little ; he was making more discoveries in regard to Mrs. Lopes—but she had said that Nancy had been in love with Lord Bingley—madly in love—and that was last summer when he had thought that she cared for him. Could it all have been flirting? And then, as if to confirm his opinion, he recalled Nancy's words in the cloister at San Giovanni, and her white, set face at Palazzo Ricasoli, as she overheard the story of Lord Bingley's death.

Should he ever forget that scene? The whirling, joyous crowd, the soft strains of

Straus's waltz, the subtle perfume of the flowers, which were cast in luxuriant disorder about the room, and Nancy, with her deathly face, framed by that garland of deep pink carnations. She had deceived him. It was not that Lord Bingley had supplanted him in her affections; she had never really loved him, it had always been Lord Bingley.

* * * *

“Aunt Prue, dear Aunt Prue!” and Guy clasped the old lady in his arms, and looked mournfully into her pale face. “Why did you not tell me you were ill?” and he sat down on a stool at her feet, and leaned his head upon her knee.

“Because, dear boy, I could not bear to trouble you with my woes, when you were already so troubled. I knew that you would come in time,” and Miss Prudence stroked the chesnut curls with the old tender movement,

and looked with sweet content on his bowed head.

“ But, Aunt Prue,” he cried, passionately, “ don’t you know that you are all the world to me ? ” and his voice broke in a sob. “ No one has loved me like you have done ; and if there is any good in me, it is due to your influence. Do you know,” he went on, “ when I have been tempted not to go quite straight, your face used to rise up before me, and I felt that if I yielded to the evil, I could never come and sit here with my head on your knee. I could never have looked in your face again.”

A tear dropped on to Guy’s curly head, and the old lady said, softly,

“ Thank God—thank God ! ”

Guy raised his head after a minute and said eagerly, “ But, Aunt Prue, you will get strong again, now that the spring has come, and the hawthorns are beginning to come out. See, your tree has already a few pink buds.”

The old lady's eyes followed his, but she shook her head, and answered softly,

"Guy, dear boy, I shall never be better in this world; I shall live a little longer, till the hawthorn is out, or perhaps till it lies on the grass like a pink carpet, and then I shall go."

Guy had watched her silently while she spoke, and an unspeakable fear came upon him, she looked so shadowy already, as if she belonged to that fairer world. He caught her hands in his, and whispered hoarsely,

"Aunt Prue, I cannot let you go; stay with us, try and grow strong."

The old lady shook her head, and a troubled look came over the calm face, as she whispered, "Dear boy, I am so weary, I yearn to be at rest. I have no pain, only I am so tired of the strife of this world." And then she suddenly roused herself, and said, "Tell me about your time at Florence; I pictured you so happy there."

"I was miserable," muttered Guy, in a husky tone.

"Miserable?" repeated the old lady, "miserable? tell me the reason. Perhaps I can help you."

"No one can help me, Aunt Prue," he returned gloomily; "but I will tell you," and then slowly, and with many breaks and pauses, he told her the story of his love for Nancy.

Miss Prudence nodded her head softly over the first part, she had been so sure about it; but when he came to Nancy's engagement to Lord Bingley, his death, and her distress, the old lady looked grave and troubled.

"You see, Aunt Prue, she was only flirting with me. She cared for Lord Bingley all the time."

"There is surely some mistake, dear," she said. "I am sure Nancy loved you. I remember that night when you went away, she came down to supper with red rings

round her eyes, and seemed so sad and distressed."

"But why did she reject me?" he cried.

"She was engaged to Lord Bingley then," answered Miss Prudence.

"But why marry a man she did not love? Of course," he continued cynically, "it was a good marriage. Perhaps she was dazzled by the title."

"Guy, Guy!" and the old lady put her hand on his mouth, "do not say those hard, bitter things; it is not like you. Be sure that there is some mistake; be patient, and—and—now that she is free, ask her again." She put her face down to his.

"Never!" cried Guy, vehemently. "She deceived me—she made me think that she loved me."

"But perhaps she did," murmured Miss Prudence, softly—"perhaps she did," and she looked appealingly into his face.

He lingered with her till the shadows began to play around the old hawthorn tree, and the hush of the evening was falling upon the world. He could not tear himself away. They talked on and on of happy old days, days when he was a bright, mischievous schoolboy, and then of the college time, which had been flecked with sadness by the death of his father. How many “do you remembers” came into that tender, dreamy chat,—memories which linked the old lady with the youth, and bridged over the waste of years.

He rose at last to depart, and stood gazing down on that loved face with a wild impetuous sorrow.

“You will not go away again?” she whispered, “till—till—,” and her voice died away.

“Not till you are quite strong, Aunt Prue, and can walk up to the Manor, and sit on your own chair under the elm tree, where you used

to sit, just you and I, on the long July evenings when I was home from school. Oh, Aunt Prue!" and he bent down, and kissed her lingeringly, "say that you will come there again."

The old lady pressed his face close to hers; she could not answer.

At that moment Hannah's well-known step was heard in the passage, and an instant later she entered the room. She held out a bony hand to Guy, and remarked,

"Well! so you have returned at last!"

"I would have come before, if you had only told me that Aunt Prue was ill," he said reproachfully.

"But she has not been ill till now," snapped Hannah, putting the medicine bottles straight upon the table; "and what good would you have been if she was ill? Everything has been done that could be, only Prudence always was the most discontented person."

“No, Hannah, no,” said Miss Prudence, softly. “I am quite content. You have been so good to me. See, Guy,” she said, pointing to the window, “Hannah has let me have the flower stand up here, was it not kind?”

“I told Prudence, if she did not intend to come downstairs and look after the nasty things, that they must be moved up here, where she could give an eye to them, instead of Bridget and I wasting our time,” and she moved over to the bed, and began to smooth out the counterpane with angry pats.

Guy smiled. He understood Hannah’s ungracious apology for her own kind thought, and he said,

“I am sure that you have done everything.”

“Oh! you believe that, do you?” retorted Hannah, raising herself from the counterpane worry, and looking disdainfully at him. Hannah looked at most people, as if they

were noisome insects—"Very condescending, I am sure, of you, to believe it. Most young people imagine that they are the only people who can do anything."

Guy turned to the door with a sigh. Somehow he could not fight with Hannah as of old; his heart was too heavy, and in Miss Prudence's gentle presence hard words seemed a desecration. He went out silently, down the trim garden, where the hyacinths and tulips were displaying their gorgeous, though rather flaunting, colours, but ere he reached the gate he heard a well-known ponderous tread behind him, and a bony hand was laid on his arm, and Hannah's voice asked,

"How do you think she looks?"

He turned, and gazed with astonishment at the hard-featured woman; there was a quiver in her voice, and a curious dimness in her eyes; he had never in the long years that he

had known her, seen her like this. He could not answer, the hopeless anguish of her face appalled him.

“Do you think that she will get well?” she continued, her voice grown cold with the control that she put upon herself.

“Miss Hannah,” he whispered, “I hope she may; but God knows she looks like death but while there is life there is hope.”

She made no response, she only stood there like a statue. Guy felt that if he lingered he must break down. Somehow the grief of this hard, stern woman was the most pathetic thing he had ever seen.

He walked slowly away, but when he reached the gate he was startled by hearing her say in her usual rasping voice, “Have the goodness, please, to see that the gate is quite latched; you young men are so careless.”

CHAPTER III.

It is June once more at Dinglehurst. The cows are standing knee-deep in a forest of yellow buttercups, whisking their tails with lazy contentment, and the hawthorns have broken forth into warm pink bloom.

The Devereux's have been at the White Ladies for nearly three weeks, and every day finds Olive at the Cottage, seated by Miss Prudence's chair, talking or reading in her clear, mellow voice, while Nancy lingers by the old lady's side, or stands gazing despondingly out of the window. The girl's face has grown strangely thin and pale, and the blue eyes have a weary expression.

Life appears very dark to her just now. From time to time she looks up lovingly at Miss Prudence, and then back again at the June landscape, which is blurred and misty with her tears. She loves the old lady with all her warm young affection, and day by day it is being borne in upon her that the frail, fairy-like face is growing more frail and ethereal looking, and hope is dying gradually in Nancy's heart.

It requires a great deal to kill the sanguineness of youth, but when it is once dead the bitterness which follows is more intense than that which comes to us in our practical, material middle age! A child's grief is so prostrating because it cannot see beyond, and Nancy, in spite of her eighteen summers, in spite of her smart trite remarks, was a mere child. She felt that with Miss Prudence all her desire for life would be gone. No one would want her. Olive had her husband, her

father was engrossed with his mines, and Guy—he did not care for her now; he had loved her once, and it had been her own fault the fading of that affection.

She had hardly seen him since her return; she tried to avoid him when he came to the Cottage. Once they had met on the stairs, and he had stood aside to let her pass. She had not dared to speak more than the commonplace greeting, he looked so stern and unyielding, though in his heart he was longing to catch a sight of her eyes; but his ire rose as he noted her pale cheek, and he imagined in his blindness, that her sadness was all for Lord Bingley.

And so things went on, and the June days floated away. Sir Eustace had kept the resolution which he had made that morning at Florence; he had striven to be unselfish, and to overcome the senseless jealousy, and day by day he had watched Olive start off to the

Cottage, without a murmur, though the hours when she was away appeared to have weights tied to them. But after the brief space of a fortnight, he gradually grew restless and impatient, and the old jealousy re-asserted itself.

He began by grumbling a little, and then he tried to dissuade her from going so often, but she pleaded with him, "Eustace, let me go; it is for such a little while longer, and the days with her are becoming so few."

Truly the sand in the hour-glass was running out quickly.

Each day found Miss Prudence a little paler and a little weaker. The hawthorns were beginning to be a trifle tarnished and shrivelled, and a few pink blossoms had fluttered down on to the green turf, and the old lady watched them thoughtfully, and said, stroking Olive's golden hair, "You must bury me at the corner of the church-yard where the hawthorn spreads its branches over the hedge, and

then in the springtime the flowers will fall gently upon my grave."

Olive only pressed her hand. They were alone this afternoon, Nancy had gone out on an errand to the village, and had not returned.

"Olive," the old lady said, at length, "are you quite happy, child? you look a little troubled sometimes."

"Yes, yes, quite happy, Aunt Prudence; I have everything I can desire, except one thing," and her voice grew low and tender, "and that is coming."

"I should like to live to see you a mother, dear," said the old lady, dreamily, "but it cannot be; I am going so soon, child; see"—and she pointed to the hawthorn tree—"the blossoms are beginning to fall, and I shall go with them." And then, after an instant, she said, "Olive, will you try and comfort Hannah when I am gone? She is so good, so good, no one can say what she has been to me.

Look at all the flowers which she lets me have, and when the nurse spilt my soup the other day over the new chintz she scarcely made a complaint. She used to be a little hard to understand sometimes, and we used," and the old lady turned the old diamond ring round on her thin finger, "we used to have little differences sometimes; but it was mostly my fault. You see, I was so careless and tiresome, and that annoyed dear Hannah; but it is quite right now, and I am sure that she is a little sorry that—" and the old lady pulled up the web-like mittens which covered her hands—"sorry that I am going to leave her; it will be lonely for her by herself. Will you promise me, child, to come and look after her?" and she looked beseechingly into Olive's face.

"I promise," Olive answered in a broken voice; "but, oh! Aunt Prudence, must you go? Will not God let you stay with us?"

And she threw her arms round the old lady and clasped her, as if striving to hold her back from death.

There was a long silence between them after that. Miss Prudence leaned back and closed her eyes. The window was open, and the light breeze floated in, and ruffled her soft, white hair, and the glad voices of children mingled with the tuneful song of the birds.

Outside all the world rejoiced. It seemed awakening, and throbbing with a new, strong pulse of happiness, while inside—and Olive sighed as she glanced at the delicate form at her side, out of which the life was slowly but surely ebbing. How plainly the blue veins showed on her waxen forehead, and what deep purple shadows lay under the sunken eyes.

She was so quiet that Olive almost feared that the spirit had flown, but after a moment Miss Prudence said softly, “Olive, there is

one more person that I want to talk about—Nancy. Tell me about that unfortunate engagement. Did she care for Lord Bingley ? ”

“ No, it was all a terrible mistake. She was flattered at first, and then, poor child, she was foolish, and he was utterly unscrupulous ; and I, Aunt Prudence, I was very much to blame.”

“ You, dear ? ” asked the old lady ; “ how could that be ? ”

“ Because,” replied Olive bitterly, “ I was so wrapped up in my own happiness that I never thought of anyone else ; ” and then she told the story of Nancy’s entanglement, and her fear of breaking off her engagement on account of what the world would say ; and her fright of confessing it.

“ Poor child,” whispered the old lady, but with a glad light in her eyes, “ poor child ! Yes, it was very foolish, very ; but thank God that she did not marry him. I feared that

she must have liked him, she looks so sad ; and it cannot be all on my account," and a mischievous smile hovered for a moment on the old lady's worn face. She was so glad, so very very glad, and she nodded her head complacently, and thought of Guy.

At that moment Hannah came in. She stalked across the room in her usual dissatisfied way, as if she was expostulating with every piece of furniture, and, closing the window with a bang, she remarked tartly to Olive, "You might have thought of shutting the window ; it is much too late to have it open ; you will have Prudence catching her death of cold."

"I was not cold, Hannah dear ; I liked the air," put in Miss Prudence.

"You always did like foolish things," returned her sister, "that is nothing new, and your illness has not made you more sensible," and she fell to her usual employment of

arranging the medicine bottles and glasses on the tray at her sister's side.

A little pink flush came into Miss Prudence's face, and she said nervously, "That will do, Hannah dear, will it not? Please leave them alone."

But Hannah paid no heed to her request until the bottles were in the exact rows that she desired, and then she said grimly, "Your friend Mr. Jones is below, asking if he may come up. I expect if this nonsense continues much longer, I shall have to buy a new stair-carpet. This everlasting tramping up and down, like people on a tread-mill, is enough to wear the very boards through," and she walked out into the passage, and before Miss Prudence could stop her, she had called to Mr. Jones to come in.

The old lady had turned suddenly white, and she gazed anxiously towards the door. An instant later, and Mr. Jones was on the

threshold ; he looked at Miss Prudence, and then he gave a start as he beheld Olive standing beside her.

He had never seen Lady Devereux since her return ; it was the first meeting, and his heart throbbed painfully, and the wedding-day and all the agony of that service returned swiftly to his mind, and he felt the old thrill of misery pass through him. He had been so sure of his own strength, so sure—and now—now that he was before her that strength forsook him, and his head felt dizzy with the old longing ; but it was only for a moment, and then he recovered himself, and came forward and greeted Olive quietly and deferentially. He felt the blood singing in his ears as he touched her hand, and made a few commonplace remarks, but outwardly he was calm and collected.

“ Can you bear it ? ” asked Miss Prudence gently, a few minutes later, when Olive had

departed, and they were alone. "Are you wise to stay?—not that I would have you go," she continued hurriedly, "for what would the poor do without you? but—if the pain is too great—"

"But it is not, Miss Prudence," he replied in a low, hoarse voice; "it was only the first sight which brought it back; it will be easier in the future, I shall be prepared," and then he took the Bible off the table and began to read to her.

* * * * *

Olive walked slowly down into the garden, and then her heart bounded with pleasure as she saw Sir Eustace waiting for her at the gate.

"I came to fetch you, dear," he said, "you were so long, and it is such a lovely evening that I thought we might walk, if you are not tired."

She made a sign of assent, and they

wandered on slowly. The breeze had died away, and the sea rippling along the sand made a harmonious melody.

"She is no better, I suppose," remarked Sir Eustace, at length.

"No," replied Olive, "each day she grows weaker; we cannot keep her much longer," and the tears rushed to her eyes for a moment, and she looked away at a white sail that glistened on the horizon. "What shall we do without Aunt Prudence?" she said, passionately; "she seems to fill up with her sympathy all the miserable shortcomings in ourselves. Oh, Eustace! I wish that we had not been so long away! If I could only have been with her through the winter."

"I am sorry too, dearest, if you regret it," he said kindly, "but we did not know till Jones wrote."

"No," replied Olive, dreamily. "By the bye, Eustace, I saw Mr. Jones just now. It

was the first time that we had met since our wedding day. How thin and pale he has grown."

"He has been working too hard, I expect; old Shuffleout never stirs from his study if he can help it, and in the Church of England a man is unfortunately not legally compelled to do his duty," replied Sir Eustace.

"But he keeps a curate," answered Olive, "and—"

"Or rather the curate is kept for him," interrupted her husband.

"Kept for him!" exclaimed Olive, "what do you mean?"

"Only this, that things were in such a bad plight, he refused to christen a dying infant, because he said that he could not bear the sight of a suffering child, and that the doctor could baptize it instead; besides sundry other neglects of like nature; so that Guy's father, Mr. Tremaine, and your Aunt Prudence put

their heads together, and managed to collect sufficient money to pay a curate—hence Mr. Jones' presence. But why should we discuss this tiresome subject, Olive? What does the world or anything matter as long as I have you?" At that moment he regretted nothing of the past.

The sun glinted through the trees, and Olive's eyes seemed to have caught a sunbeam as she whispered, "What have I done to deserve such happiness? My life is so full of love, with yours, and with that which is coming."

Sir Eustace felt a cold shiver run through him at her last words. Why could his love not satisfy her? Why should she desire anything more? Would the child come between them and rob him of part of her love? At that thought the jealousy revived and maddened him, and then came the awful knowledge that the child would not be—He

could not finish, reproach and remorse for his sin took possession of him, and he walked gloomily on. Olive did not notice his sudden silence. She was dreaming of the future, of the little child who was to fill so much of her life, and she pictured its soft arms round her neck, and its cooing voice in her ears.

They reached the garden with its cool, green grass plots, and trim yew hedges. The splash of the fountains and cry of the peacocks mingled well with the mellow tones of the cuckoo.

“Is it not beautiful?” Olive whispered. “How could you bear to have been away from this place for so many years?”

“It was lonely, dearest, and I was sad by myself,” he answered evasively, “but it has put on a new face since you have come. You make all the sunshine for me. If you love ‘The White Ladies,’ we will give up wandering and stay here always.”

CHAPTER IV.

NANCY walked slowly home from the village. She lingered as she reached the little blue bay where the trees strayed down to the water's edge and the brown sea-weed clung to the grey rocks. The water was a liquid amber, with swiftly changing iridescent lights. It was so lovely that she stayed her steps and gazed down meditatively, and then she slowly descended the steep path which led to the shore, and sank down on a smooth flat rock.

Was it only a little more than a year ago since she had sat there and wondered, and planned, and thought, and—and—met Guy? Only such a short time ago! What meaning-

less things are months and weeks, what a poor measurement of time compared to that inner consciousness of ours which tells us that a whole life has been thrust into a year, or a year lengthened into many lives !

Nancy shuddered as she went over the past months ; she seemed to have lived through so many joys and sorrows, and to have grown quite old in the process ; and then she watched the little waves ripple in, and the gulls float gracefully on those luminous waters, till a patter of little feet startled her, and a moment later a cold nose was pushed into her hands, and two paws were placed on her knee.

“ Oh, Crib ! Crib ! ” she cried, throwing her arms round the dog, “ you have not forgotten me, you love me still, dear old boy,” she whispered ; “ you have not changed, like—like—someone else. Dogs are much more faithful than men ; but you see, Crib, it was my fault partly, and he thought I was only

trifling," and she kissed the animal's head, and he looked up pityingly in her face, as if he would fain give her a little comfort.

Guy was mooning along; he had just left the cottage, where he had paid his daily visit to Miss Prudence; she had looked very weary this evening, and there was an expression in her face which made him tremble.

She had held his hand so long in hers, and had stroked his hair in her old loving way, and then, just as he rose to go, she had drawn his head down to hers, and whispered, "Guy, I was right, dear, about Nancy. She did not really love Lord Bingley, it was all a mistake. Do not be hard on her, dear; remember she is very young, and—Guy, we are not all perfect—we expect perfection in others, and are very indulgent to ourselves," and she pressed his hand eagerly in hers, and said, "Let me see it all right between you before I go," and he had answered nothing, he had only kissed her, and

then walked out silently into the soft June sunset.

He wanted to think, and he strayed down on to the smooth yellow sands. He had known ever since the first day of his return home that Miss Prudence was dying, but to-day he felt that it was coming very near. A change had come over her face, a foreshadowing of that great eternity to which she was approaching. Guy felt an awful desolation come over him. Miss Prudence had filled so much of his heart; she seemed the background of his whole existence, the anchor which had saved him from drifting on to many a rocky shoal; and now, what was to become of him, and he hit savagely at the rocks with his stick. There was no one to live for. His sister was not sympathetic to him; she put too great a stress on the world and society; and Nancy,—Nancy was false. He had loved her, but she had played with him.

“What did Aunt Prudence mean?” he muttered to himself, “about her not loving Lord Bingley?” Perhaps it was true, but that did not mean that she loved him. “Women are incomprehensible, the world is a miserable place. I don’t see the good of living. All the people one cares about die, or—or—” but the thought did not finish itself, for he started as he turned the corner of the promontory, and perceived Nancy, with Crib clasped in her arms.

It was too late to retreat, so he raised his hat, and said in a studiously cold voice, “You had better put the dog down, he is very wet and dirty;” and then he continued, “This is the last place I expected to meet you, Miss Lavendercombe, as you informed me that you particularly disliked the sea-shore.”

“And so I do,” replied Nancy, putting Crib gently on to the ground, and then she added

half fiercely, "Shall I tell you the reason why I hate it?"

A sudden resolution came to her that she would tell him the story of her engagement; she would make one effort to vindicate herself, one effort to regain his good opinion.

Guy was standing with his back towards her, idly throwing pebbles into the sea, making a long line of ducks and drakes.

"Very obliging of you," he replied in the same unemotional voice, "but I need not trouble you, for I think I can distinctly remember your reasons. You told me that the water spoilt your frocks, and the sand got into your shoes, and the noise of the waves was melancholy, and—"

"But that is not true; it was not the real reason," cried Nancy hotly, the blood rushing into her face, and the blue eyes darting a look of passionate resentment at Guy's unconscious back. "It was the sea-shore, which was the

cause of all my misery. It was on the seashore that I promised to marry—Lord Bingley,” the last word was whispered.

Guy stopped in the act of flinging another stone, the last was still hopping away with a pleasing splash. He turned round sharply. Why did Nancy torture him like this?

“It was a very unlucky business for you,” he said stiffly, “I am sorry that you cared so much for such a worthless man.”

“But I did not care for him,” cried Nancy, stamping her foot on the sand.

“Quite *fin de siècle*,” murmured Guy to himself.

“Will you never understand?” she exclaimed. “I thought I liked him, and he worked upon my feelings; he told me that I was the only person who could influence him, and save him from his wicked life.”

Guy laughed satirically.

“And when I begged him to release me,”

continued Nancy, her voice trembling with agitation, "before going to San Giovanni, he refused. He said that it was impossible—that—that I had compromised myself with him."

"Scoundrel!" broke from Guy.

"I know," she went on, "that it is ever so wicked to break an engagement, but—but you see, I was so dreadfully miserable," and her head sank in her hands, and a few tears trickled through her fingers. Crib came, and softly licked her face, and Guy stood silent and morose, looking gloomily out at the horizon.

He hated to see a woman cry, most of all Nancy, and he longed to comfort her, but he was sore and angry. The question would recur, why had she allowed him to go to San Giovanni; and drift back into the old happy converse? It was cruel, heartless, to make him think that she cared for him, and he began to walk slowly away, but as he reached

the corner of the little bay, he said in a hard, unrelenting voice, "You had better be quite sure of your own mind in future. It is an uncomfortable thing to engage yourself to the wrong man ; and they may not all be so considerate, and die off as conveniently as this one has done."

Guy's heart smote him as he uttered these stinging words. Nancy sat huddled up upon the rock, a great dejection displaying itself in her attitude, her hands were clasped round her knees, and her eyes were gazing out seaward, with an awful despondency. She made no response to his bitter words ; she sat there motionless till he had disappeared, and then she flung herself upon the sand, and a storm of tears burst from her.

"It is no good," she wailed, "no good ! There is no happiness, it is all a hateful sham ; and Aunt Hannah is quite right, no man remembers, they all forget, or else they are

revengeful and never forgive. I wish I was dead. I think I will turn Roman Catholic, and become a nun, or go out and nurse the lepers—anything to get away from this horrible place,” and she glanced angrily round at the soft purple downs, and gleaming sea.

Crib did not follow his master. He sat on his haunches in front of Nancy, peering anxiously into her tear-stained face. He was striving hard to understand what was happening; but human creatures are difficult to comprehend, and distinctly peculiar in their actions, and he thought it unkind of his master to go off in such a huff, and his good opinion of him diminished considerably.

Guy walked round the corner of the bay, and then sat down. He felt miserable and angry, partly with himself, but more with Nancy. He told himself over and over again that she was only a flirt, and not worth caring about; but, somehow, he could not bring him-

self to believe his own assertions, and Miss Prudence's words would return to him :—

“Do not be hard upon her. I am sure she loves you.” Could it be so? Could the words which he had dreamed that she had uttered on the mountain have been true? She had told him that it was only a dream, but she had looked so strange while she said it, and—Guy began to see light—at that period she had been bound to Lord Bingley. It was different now, she was free; he had half a mind to ask her again, only he had behaved so unkindly in speaking those harsh words. He had been very hard upon her, in spite of Aunt Prue's pleading.

“What a brute I am!” he muttered. “I will go and tell her that I am sorry, and that I did not mean it,” and he walked slowly back, over the soft wet sand. As he turned the promontory he beheld Nancy with her face buried in a bunch of yellow sea-weed, and

her poor little shoulders shaking with the long-drawn sobs.

Guy was frightened, and then a strange joy came to him. Would she have cared so much about his hasty words, if—if—? Crib sat silently contemplating Nancy's quivering form, with his ears cocked, and a piteous expression in his round eyes. He looked coldly at his master, who he felt was somehow the cause of this trouble.

"Miss Lavendercombe," said Guy, in a trembling voice, "what is the matter? Please don't cry. I came back to say that I am very sorry that I spoke so roughly just now; I did not mean it really, only I was cross and angry; and—will you forgive me?" and he sat down beside her.

She raised her little red, tear-stained face, with a festoon of sea-weed still sticking to her hair, and murmured, in a choked voice, "Then you don't think me quite as bad as you said?"

I have been ever so foolish, I know, but I did not mean to do wrong—indeed I did not. It was all a horrible mistake,” and a fresh cascade of tears followed this remark.

“I know, I know,” said Guy, getting desperate; “I will believe anything, if you will only stop crying and tell me that—” and he hesitated, and looked at the little bowed head, with its rough, yellow hair. How could he ever have been cross to her?

While he hesitated, she raised her eyes, drenched with tear-drops, to his face, and said, “Tell you what?”

“Tell me,” whispered Guy, “if those words were really a dream, which I thought you spoke on the mountain, coming back from Gubbio. I will forgive you anything, if you only tell me, Nancy, that they were true.”

The little head went down into her hands, and the answer was so low that no one who had not abnormally good hearing could possibly

have caught it, but Guy's ears were peculiarly sharp, and, to judge by his actions, the answer was eminently satisfactory.

"Are you quite sure that it is right this time, Nancy darling?" he asked, after a long silence filled up in the way most pleasing to lovers; "because I do not feel inclined to go out in a boat and get drowned."

"Don't talk about it!" she cried. "Oh Guy! what should I have done if it had been you, or if you had been hurt that night on the mountain?"

"You would have told the truth then, dearest, and saved all this misery. But Nancy," he continued, "why did you let me go to San Giovanni? Why did you not tell me at Florence about your engagement?"

"Because I was a coward, and selfish, and because I wanted to have just one free, happy week with you before—and, Guy, it was a

bad reason," she said, with a return of her old mischievous manner, "but I loved you so."

He made no answer in words, but his response was very complete, and Crib began to find his position of third a little awkward and uncomfortable. He felt quite left out in the cold, and he thought it hard that he, who had remained all the while by Nancy's side trying to comfort her, should reap no reward, while his master, who had been distinctly to blame, should have all the caresses. It certainly was a very odd world, he thought, and human creatures were most unstable and undependable, and Crib trotted sullenly off, determined to drown his woes in a good rabbit hunt.

Guy and Nancy sat on regardless of time—regardless of all except the blissful knowledge that they loved each other.

"I thought it such a horrid world an hour

ago,” exclaimed Nancy at last; “and now it is all just lovely and happy, except—” and she stopped—“except Aunt Prudence. Oh Guy! will she not be pleased?”

“It was her doing,” murmured the young man softly, “she has been my good angel all my life; it was the memory of her face which has kept me from many a sin, and now she has given you to me;” and he stooped and kissed the girl gravely.

“How do you mean?” asked Nancy; “she has not given her consent yet, and Aunt Hannah—she never did approve of matrimony; she will be just mad.”

“Never mind her,” replied Guy; “it was Aunt Prue who bade me ask you again. Come let us go and tell her.”

The lovers entered the cottage softly, and stole up the little steep stairs.

Miss Prudence was leaning back with her eyes closed, and Hannah sat stiff and rigid in

a corner, her bony hands folded in her lap, and deep lines traced on her forehead.

“Aunt Prue,” said Guy, bending over the old lady with an anxious glance.

Hannah made a half movement, and then changed her mind, and sat like some stern and dismal fate.

“Aunt Prue.”

The old lady opened her eyes and looked up in his face half bewildered, and then she murmured, “You must bear it, dear ; it is very hard, but it will be all put right in heaven.”

“She is wandering,” whispered Guy, and then he put his hand softly on the old lady’s, and said, “Aunt Prue, listen. It is all right here ; Nancy has promised to be my wife. Will you give us your blessing?” and he knelt down by her chair, and drew the girl down beside him.

A gleam of recognition and joy passed over the old lady’s face, and then she murmured,

“God bless you both, and grant that you may ‘so pass through things temporal, that you finally lose not the things eternal.’ I am so glad, Guy, dear boy, so glad—God has been very good to me. He has let me see that which I have prayed for before I die. I am ready now, quite ready, and it is time, for, see, the pink hawthorn blossoms are lying on the grass, and I am so weary—so weary.”

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That was the last day that Miss Prudence sat in her chair by the window. During the days which followed, she lay in her small dimity-curtained bed, very silent and peaceful. She spoke little, but she always had a bright loving smile for those around. Hannah rarely left her; she sat in a corner with her hard face grown more grim and stern by the grief which consumed her.

Miss Prudence's eyes often wandered towards her sister, and she would strive to

speak some words of comfort. At last a day came when she was more weak and still. She lay all day half unconscious, but towards evening she roused herself and said, "Hannah, dear, it is coming very near now! I am going to leave you, but, before I go, I want to hear you say that you forgive me all the times I vexed you. If I could live over again, I would try to be more particular, dear, about the carpets and things, and I would try and not care so much about having the flowers in the house, for they do make a mess."

Hannah stood by the bed silent, her face working strangely. "Prudence," she said, and her rasping voice seemed to have caught a sweetness from her sister,—“Prudence, I have been harsh and unkind to you, especially at that time when, he, Edward Mashingham, went away. I was jealous of your comeliness and of your sweet nature. I am sorry for it now, but I came into the world with a bitter taste

in my mouth, and that seems to have tainted everything. I wish I had been better to you, but it is too late, now, too late!" and a sharp spasm contracted her face, and the bony fingers strained themselves tightly round the iron of the bed. She longed to cry aloud in her pain, but the wall of reserve and coldness was too strong to be broken down, and she stood there silent and stricken by her grief.

"Hannah, dear, do not speak like that," whispered Prudence; "we have been very happy together; we never quarrelled, dear; the differences only sprang from your being so much cleverer than me, I was always stupid, you see, and it was difficult to be patient with me."

Hannah could not answer, a gasping sob rose in her throat, and tears trickled slowly over her cheeks. She turned away and drew the curtain back from the window, and let in a long streak of sunlight which fell upon the

bed and then crept up and illumined Prudence's dying face.

"Hannah," she whispered, after a minute, "give me his old letters and the miniature, I want to look at them once more, and then—" and she stopped to recover her breath—"and then you will put them with me into the coffin. Promise me, promise me to do that."

Hannah bowed her head as she placed the faded yellow packet on the bed, and watched the thin white fingers wander tenderly over it.

"I cannot read them now, Hannah dear, my eyes are growing dim. Will you read them to me?" and Hannah sat down beside the bed, and read the old love letters in a trembling broken voice.

They were bright, boyish letters, full of hope in his profession and of love for her to whom they were addressed. Hannah folded them up again as she finished, and laid them gently on the bed, and the two sisters remained there

silent. Their thoughts had wandered back to their own youth, and the fifty years which had passed seemed as nothing.

Prudence had a sweet smile on her thin face, as she thanked her sister, and then she whispered, "I shall see him so soon now; I have kept my faith. It has been such a long waiting, but it is over now," and she sank back exhausted by the emotion.

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A little later and they knelt round her bed, while Mr. Jones prayed. A holy calm was upon her face, and she whispered a loving farewell to each in turn.

"Guy, dear boy," she said, "do not grieve for me. God has given you Nancy to comfort you."

"Aunt Prue, Aunt Prue!" he cried, passionately, "I cannot let you die; what shall we do without you?"

"You have each other," murmured the old

lady, "and you will not forget me. You will talk of me sometimes when you sit under the elm tree."

"And Harold," she said, "good-bye. God help you in your work, and in your trouble. Wish the old people farewell for me, and tell them that it is blessed to enter into His rest."

"Children," she said, drawing Olive and Nancy close to her, "I would that I had had you for a little longer; you have made my life very bright. God grant that your lives may be so also. Be patient, both of you, and remember that life is not all brightness; and when the shadows come, may He be with you. And, Nancy," she whispered very low, "be good to Guy, he is my own dear boy; remember he is my legacy to you."

The girl could not answer. She buried her face in the bed, and sobbed her heart out.

"Hannah, dear," said Miss Prudence after a few minutes, "please come and hold my

hand, my eyes are getting so dim, I cannot see your face, and the letters—let me feel them. Yes, that is right,” as Hannah placed them in her hands. “The room is so bright now, and there is singing, such sweet singing, and it is coming nearer and nearer, and there is a scent of hawthorn bloom. Do you not hear the music?” she cried, raising herself up, and looking round at them. “And there are angel faces, and glistening white robes, and—and—” Her face seemed suddenly transfigured by a glorious light, and she whispered, “I see his face, that long loved face!” and, sinking back into Hannah’s arms, that gentle, tender spirit passed to its eternal rest.

CHAPTER V.

THEY laid her to rest in the corner of the churchyard where the hawthorn peeped over the hedge, and shed a shower of pink blossoms in the spring time.

The graveyard was crowded with the poor village folk, who stood in a mournful group and watched the last rites performed over their best-beloved friend.

The coffin was borne by six stalwart fishermen, who had all loved and revered her during her life and had begged, with tears, to be allowed to bear her to her last rest.

The grave was covered with flowers, wreaths woven by kindly hands. There were glorious

orchids, pure white eucharis, and warm red roses, and beside them lay the gifts of poorer friends, one of late cowslips, another of ox-eyed daisies, and, lastly, one of hawthorne. No one save Bridget knew whence that wreath came. She alone had seen Hannah steal out at night, and pick a branch from the old tree, and then weave it into a garland and lay it on her dead sister. She alone had seen the bitter tears which fell on the green leaves, and heard the passionate, remorseful words which came from those stern lips.

Mr. Jones' voice trembled audibly as he read the Burial Service, and there was many a suppressed sob from those around.

Hannah stood by the grave, statue-like in her grief, her face might have been cast in stone, it was so immobile. Nancy cried gently, and Guy was dazed by sorrow and despair. Was it a dream? Should he never see that sweet face again? Never feel her fingers

smooth his hair, never hear that voice which had calmed and soothed him in so many boyish troubles?

He started as Mr. Jones' voice ceased, and as he saw the people begin to move slowly away, and he grasped Nancy's hand in his and whispered,

“My darling, we must try and comfort one another.”

Mr. Jones walked home with a heavy heart, and feeling an utter sense of desolation. He had no one left. His mother, his sister, and now she who had been his dearest, his best friend, was taken, and for a moment a feeling of intense bitterness rose in his heart.

Sir Eustace was putting Olive tenderly into the carriage. Nancy was walking away with Guy, and even Hannah had Bridget at her side, as she stalked silently down the path. Why should they all have some one to cling to, some one to comfort them, and he alone be

solitary. How he envied Miss Prudence! she had crossed the dark river of death; she had left this weary disappointing world, and had reached the land where there are no partings; she knew all, she understood all.

He lingered at the gate of the churchyard. How many memories the place possessed for him! some tender, some sweet, but all sad, and one, ah! one bitter recollection which seemed to rise up and overcloud all the others—the memory of that one awful marriage service. Would he ever forget the agony of that time? The sharp, frenzied pain had passed now, he had so far conquered his love for Olive that he could bear to see her, bear to be with her, but in his heart he knew that his love was only slumbering. He could not tear it out; the roots had woven themselves so strongly into his being.

As he reached the door of the little red-brick cottage Mrs. Haiden bustled round a

corner, determined upon a chat; he knew the signals well, and that it was little use resisting when she was in one of her voluble moods, so he resigned himself with a sigh, and leaned wearily against the porch.

“It did go off just beautiful-like, Sir,” she began, resting her hands on her ample figure; “I don’t know as ever I saw a nicer done funeral, so comfortable like, there wasn’t a thing as I’d ’ave ’ad altered. I could not a-help thinking all the time, Sir, how pleased she’d ’ave been with it all, especially with the way as they carried of her, no jolting about and jerking, all so nice and in step. Dear, dear, but it do seem a pity as she should have been took; it be desperate sad, desperate sad! There be precious few like her, precious few. Folks mostly now thinks only of theirselves; there ain’t the kindness in

the world as there used to be when I was a girl."

"There is more than we think, perhaps, Mrs. Haiden," put in the clergyman absently.

"Aye, sir, perhaps there be, perhaps there be; but I reckon we'll all miss her kindness," and she wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. "But it were a blessed privilege to know her, sir, and it ought to make us a deal better, I'm thinking, a deal better," and Mrs. Haiden bustled tearfully away.

"A privilege to have known her, and it ought to make us a deal better." Yes, that was the way to look at it, and he had only thought of his present sorrow, and not of all those years of blissful converse which he had held with Miss Prudence. He sat down on the little hard, horsehair sofa, and took himself severely to task for his ingratitude, and then fell into a dream of those sweet bygone

days, and prayed that he might be a “deal better” for those happy hours.

Hannah walked home in stony silence, her face betraying none of the anguish which inwardly consumed her. Bridget looked furtively at her mistress once or twice, but she dared not intrude by words upon her grief. Hannah entered the cottage, and walked firmly upstairs into the little dimity-curtained bed room, and closed the door.

What a rush of memories assailed her, as she stood on the threshold, and gazed around ! The recollections were overwhelming, and she bent her head, as one bows before some scathing blast.

The room was untouched, unaltered, except for the absence of that fair presence. The arm chair stood in its accustomed place by the window, and beside it reposed the little round table with her books and knick-knacks. The small black satin bag hung over a corner of

the chair, filled with the last spills which she had made, and some long strips of paper still lay ready for use on the table, while the wire flower-stand was basking in sunlight, resplendent with crimson geraniums, purple cinerarias and soft feathery, maiden-hair.

Hannah looked round dry-eyed at the familiar objects, and a sense of prostrating desolation and remorse came over her, the awful feeling that she could never make up to her sister for all her harsh words and looks, never plead for her forgiveness for her unkind actions.

Hannah's conscience smote her sorely, her sister was dead, and she had made her life more or less unhappy by her waspish tongue. She had been cruel to her at the time when she should have been most tender. When her lover had not returned she had twitted her with his unfaithfulness. And, later, through those long patient years which had followed,

had she not wearied her day by day with her senseless fads?

And now, alas! the self-reproach came too late; she could never make reparation, and she sank upon her knees by the arm-chair, and long, heart-rending sobs broke from her, sobs which seemed to shake her being to its foundations. She tried to pray, but the words refused to come, and heaven's door seemed closed against her.

She rose at length, stiff and desolate, and looked blankly round the room. As she did so her eyes fell on the flowers rejoicing in the sunlight, which ebbed in through a chink of the closed blinds. They were the flowers which her sister had loved and tended; she would tend them now for her sake. It was the only atonement that she could make, the only token of love which she could offer, and she took the little stand up carefully, and carried it tenderly down into the drawing-room.

Half an hour later, Bridget peeped in, and saw her still standing beside it, and heard her murmur,

“ I will cherish them for your sake, Prudence ; you loved them, and they are all that is left to me of you,” and then Bridget had stolen away again on tip-toe and an hour later when she answered the bell, her eyes were red and swollen with weeping—tears which she had shed more for the desolate remorseful woman left, than for the gentle holy spirit that had flown.

And so those days of sadness rolled away. The sorrow and anxiety had been too much for Olive, and she lay for several weeks on the sofa, white and weary, and Sir Eustace hung over her in an agony of fear and apprehension, till he saw her beginning to revive, and then came calm and peaceful days—days in which the husband and wife drew very near to each other. There

was no cause for jealousy and so it slumbered.

At last his dream was realized—he had Olive to himself, and he was happy, yes, blissfully happy. Day by day he would draw her in a Bath chair, or carry her on to a sofa in a distant corner of the lawn, and there they would spend those long July days in sweet and tender converse, till the sun grew weary of his life, and sank slowly into the blue rippling sea.

He yielded himself up to the charm of those halcyon hours ; he felt no remorse for the past, he steadfastly put those thoughts away, and he troubled not about the future. He imagined that at length he had gained that delusive phantom of happiness, for which he had longed and craved ; and for which he had sacrificed everything.

He saw not the gathering clouds rise on that smiling sky ; he remembered not that a

passion which slumbers gathers strength, and that when the moment comes it will rise up with renewed powers and master us. He thought of naught as he lingered by Olive's side, listening to the silvery splash of the fountains, naught but that at last he possessed her entirely, completely, and for the moment his soul was satisfied.

CHAPTER VI.

“AND so your brother is really going to marry Miss Lavendercombe. Let me offer you my sincerest condolences,” and Cyril Fitzgerald sank into the most comfortable chair in the room, and looked sympathisingly into Mrs. Lopes’ face.

“It is most annoying,” she said, “really most annoying; but Guy always was as obstinate as—well—as a man can be.”

“It was very unfortunate about Lord Bingley, and when we had worked so hard,” continued Cyril. “I assure you, dear Mrs. Lopes, I did what I could in Florence, I urged him on, I—well, I drew a little on my

imagination about her father's wealth, as you suggested, and I spread as many reports about them as I could."

"I am sure, Cyril, you did all that was kind," returned Mrs. Lopes; "but what is the use of wasting one's energies over people who have no wish to get on in the world—who are as blind as bats to their own interests. It is not of the least consequence to me if Guy chooses to marry a little second-rate American."

"But the house was nice," said Cyril in his purring voice; "it was convenient for the children."

Mrs. Lopes looked up, not perfectly sure that he was not laughing at her, but Cyril's face was as expressionless as usual, he was smoothing his elegant white hands, and changing a large gold ring from one finger to the other.

"Of course, it was most useful," she

answered; "but if he had only chosen to marry Lady Gertrude Wyndham, as I suggested, I should not have cared about that."

"Ah! you suggested that, did you?" said Cyril, changing his position a little; "but your brother did not see it?"

"No," replied Mrs. Lopes, flushing angrily; "he never could see anything which was for his good; he absolutely laughed at the idea."

"Well, she is not very attractive looking," went on Cyril. "I painted a miniature of her last year, and she is a little old—perhaps fifty, but that is the merest detail, of course—it is quite the fashion now to marry an 'Ancestor.'"

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"Miss Hannah, may I come in for a minute?" inquired Guy, as he leaned over the gate, and contemplated Hannah's angular form, stalking to and fro in the garden,

superintending Solomon (who was gardener as well as flyman) cutting a few shrubs.

She had aged much in the last two months. Her straight figure was bent, and she moved more slowly, and with none of the sharp distinctly expostulating movements as of old. She made a sign of assent, and Guy unlatched the gate, and followed her to the door.

She glanced down as of old at his boots, and said,

“Please jump over the door-step, it has just been washed,” and then marshalled him silently into the drawing-room.

How lonely and desolate it looked without Miss Prudence; There was none of the pleasant litter of womanly occupation which had always hovered round her. All was stiff, cold, and uncompromising.

Hannah stood beside the little flower-stand. Her bony fingers were encased in gardening

gloves, and her black dress looped some way above her ankles.

“I came to say good-bye, Miss Hannah,” said Guy, hesitatingly. He had paid the old lady many visits since Miss Prudence’s death, but he had always found her in the garden, and this was the first time that he had been in the little drawing-room without Miss Prudence.

A pang went through him as he looked at the empty chair, and the stool where he had sat so often, and poured out all his woes to that tender, sympathising ear.

How many memories crowded upon him! They seemed to rise up on all sides, and cry to him of the days that were gone. How well he remembered the last time he had come to say good-bye before going to the West Indies, when he had sat there in the firelight, and she had given him courage and hope.

The scene came so vividly before him. He

seemed to hear the sound of the rain-drops pattering on the window-panes, and the rustle of the paper, as Miss Prudence folded the spills and slipped them into the well-known black satin bag; and he saw the firelight flickering over the room, and that dear, graceful figure seated in the old arm-chair. He drew a long laboured breath, and he could with difficulty restrain his emotion; but Hannah's hard, rasping voice brought him back to the prosaic present, and with an effort he strove to answer calmly.

"It is a pity that you do not settle quietly at the Manor, instead of rushing off to the other end of the world; but young people are as restless as kittens, they get tired of a ball of wool before they have unwound half of it."

"But we should much rather stay at home, Miss Hannah," he replied, "but I am forced to go about that tiresome business."

"What your father was thinking about

when he put money into such a concern, I am sure I do not know."

"It paid well then," murmured Guy, apologetically.

"Yes, and that's about all that people care for now—more money and more pleasure. Never a morsel of stability or seriousness in any of them."

Guy made no response. He was weary of arguing, and how he missed that sweet, gentle voice, which had always striven to throw a kindly light upon every subject.

"You have left her flowers here," he said at last gently.

"Yes," returned Hannah, "I left them; they make a dreadful mess, but Bridget attends to them," and then her voice grew suddenly tender as she added, "and I like to have them, she loved them so," and the hard face softened strangely, and the bony hands touched the flowers lovingly.

Guy made no answer. A sob seemed to stop his utterance, and the June sunshine was blurred and misty.

“I must be off,” he said in a husky voice. “Good-bye, Miss Hannah,” and he held out his hand.

The old lady glanced sharply at him, and then she put her fingers into his, and said,

“I hope that you will be happy, Guy, but matrimony is a great venture, and Nancy is rather flighty, I am afraid,” and then she loosed his hand, and he walked silently to the door. As he reached it Hannah’s voice arrested him.

“Wait a minute,” she said, “there is something that I want to give you before you go, something—” and she stopped and gazed out of the window—“something of hers,” and she went past him, out into the hall, and up the stairs.

Guy remained where he was, his eyes

rivettted on the dear familiar room. How many times he had vaulted in through the window, and had sat by Miss Prudence, recounting some boyish scrape or dilating upon some hard won cricket-match.

“Ah, Aunt Prue! Aunt Prue!” he murmured, “what should I have done without you?”

At that moment Hannah returned and put a small gold locket into his hand. How well he knew it; Miss Prudence had always worn it, and it contained a portrait of his mother, with a curl of her hair.

“She would have liked you to have it,” said Hannah, and there was a quiver in her hard voice; “and this,” and she opened a small red case, “this is the old diamond ring she used to wear; she wished Nancy to have it. Will you give it to her? I meant to have done it myself—but—” and she turned away, and pulled up the blind with her old

bustling, restless way—"but, I cannot bear to talk about her yet—by and bye perhaps, but not now," and a tear fell on the little red case in her hand, and then she thrust it into Guy's fingers, and hastily turned away.

Guy stood a moment looking down upon the ring, and then he stole softly out of the room, and down the little drive, somehow the brightness of the garden jarred upon him. The flowers were positively rioting in their glad joyousness of life. The sunflowers seemed to exult in their golden splendour, and the phloxes and pinks rampaged over the borders in glorious abandonment. Did they not know that she was dead, that she would never walk among them again, never tend them as of yore?

Guy walked on slowly; as he passed the churchyard he lingered, and looked tenderly down at the new-made grave with the plain marble cross at its head.

As he turned to pursue his way, he felt a hand on his arm, and Nancy said :

“ Wait for me, Guy ; I have brought these roses. It is the last time for so long that I shall put them on her,” and she knelt down, and placed a cross of pale pink blossoms on the green mound.

“ Nancy,” said Guy softly, “ I have something for you—something Miss Hannah sent you,” and he drew the little case from his pocket, and slipped the old-fashioned diamond ring on to the girl’s finger.

“ Aunt Prue wished you to have it, darling,” he said, stooping down and looking wistfully into her face. “ You are to wear it always for her sake.”

“ But I am not worthy !” she exclaimed, suddenly. “ Oh, Guy, dearest ! I am not worthy. If I could only grow more like her ! I have prayed so hard that God would help me to follow in her footsteps and make me a good

wife to you. She left you to me as her legacy, and somehow I feel that one day she will ask how I have fulfilled her trust ; and if well she will smile at me with the dear old smile, and kiss me as she used to when I sat by her side through those long winter evenings," and the girl paused, and looked dreamily away at the distant streak of sea.

"She talked of you so much, Guy, then," she continued after a minute, "I think she guessed that I loved you," and Nancy looked tenderly into his face.

He did not answer in words, but he drew her close to him and kissed her long and lovingly.

* * * *

The summer had faded, and October had come. The elms had donned their golden garments, and the maples were resplendent in crimson and yellow.

Nancy and Guy are married, and on their

way to the West Indies, and at "The White Ladies" there is a little Eustace born with a soft baby face, and his father's dark eyes.

At first Sir Eustace looked at Olive and the boy with joy and pride, and then mingling with that happiness came horror and reproach. The child seemed to make his sin stand out in more ghastly colours, and it hurt him to see Olive bend over it in such glad content.

"If she only knew," the fiend whispered, "the disgrace you have brought upon her, only knew that the child was not—"

Sir Eustace tried to drown the voice, but it rang persistently in his ears, and the image of his son confronted him like some stern Nemesis. And so it came to pass that the child, which should have brought love, brought bitterness, remorse, misery. And then the old jealousy which had slumbered, revived with renewed force. It maddened him to see Olive's intense love; it drove him distracted to watch her

caresses, and he gradually began to loathe his own child.

At first he fought against the terrible feeling with horror and dismay; he strove to battle with this awful thought, but, alas! he had made his choice of the downward path, and this was only another link in that chain, which was dragging him into that limitless abyss of evil.

For a time Olive did not notice Sir Eustace's jealousy, and discontent. She was so wrapped up in that tiny morsel of humanity, that for the moment her husband was a little put on one side. It was not exactly that she loved him less, but the child seemed to monopolise her every thought, and she was a woman in whom the maternal instincts were strongly emphasized.

Her first awakening to his state of mind came some three months after the child's birth. Sir Eustace had controlled himself hitherto.

He had possessed his anger in silence, but each day it grew and strengthened, and at length it broke out in a burst of unmeasured petulance and rage.

It had been arranged that Olive was to accompany him upon a visit to some old friends who had taken a house in the neighbourhood. The visit had been postponed several times owing to Olive's unwillingness to leave the child, but at last a day had been finally settled; when on the morning of their departure Olive came to her husband and said—

“Eustace, I cannot leave the child to-day; he has been so poorly all night, you must go alone.”

Sir Eustace did not answer; for a moment, he hesitated, and then his anger burst forth.

“Am I to be sacrificed for ever to the child?” he said in a voice quivering with rage. “Do you expect me to be satisfied with the beggarly crumbs of love which you can

spare from the child? If your affection is dead, have you no feeling of duty towards me?" And he looked sternly at her, his eyes flashing with a hard scornful light.

Olive was startled by his words, and then a weary feeling came over her, she was so tired of battling with this eternal jealousy.

"Eustace," she pleaded, "do not look at me like that. You know that my love is the same for you. But you cannot," and she hesitated, "be jealous of your own child!"

The words fell from her almost unawares, and their awful purport seemed to thrill her with horror.

Sir Eustace did not answer; he stood gazing moodily out of the window, his face dark, and his hands working restlessly. He did not answer her question; he only said—

"Will you come with me? If your love is

as strong as you say, you will hardly sacrifice my pleasure for a mere caprice."

"But it is not a mere caprice," cried Olive, passionately; "the child is ill, and suppose that he should become worse while I am away."

"Nonsense! it is a mere childish indisposition," he exclaimed. "The child will be well enough ere you return. Too well, perhaps," he muttered under his breath, and then he shuddered at his own thought. What a fiend he was becoming! To what extremes was his sin and jealousy leading him, that he should even desire the death of his own child! He shivered with horror at the ghastly thought, and then he turned to his wife, and said pleadingly,

"Come with me, Olive. Do not refuse me; it is my great love for you which makes me jealous; come with me just this time."

Still she hesitated. She could not bear to say him nay, and yet, the child—how could she leave it?

He saw her hesitation, and he turned coldly away, and began arranging some papers.

“Eustace,” she said, “if I came I should be miserable. Do not ask me ;” and she laid her hands imploringly on his arm.

He looked at her for one brief moment, and a spasm of agony crossed his face, and then he silently unloosed her fingers, and left her without a word. His jealousy of the child increased tenfold. He had been supplanted by it, put aside, and his request calmly refused. And yet Olive had said that her love for him was unchanged.

Vain words ! For the future he must come second, he must see the child on his throne, basking in the smiles and caresses that should have been his, and a savage bitterness and misery took possession of him.

CHAPTER VII.

AND so the days and weeks passed by, and almost imperceptibly Olive and Sir Eustace drifted farther and farther apart, away from their sweet tender converse. There had been no violent rupture, no tearing away of old ties, no rending asunder by harsh words. The change had come slowly and insidiously. The first touch had been the conversation recorded in the last chapter.

Olive had been hurt and angry at her husband's behaviour; she had thought him unreasonable, cruel to wish her to leave the child, and he, in his turn, had been furious with jealousy at her choosing to remain with

the baby rather than to accompany him, and so that first little breach had widened until a gulf seemed to have opened between them, and the old happy intercourse was clouded and dimmed.

Sir Eustace's love for his wife was as intense as ever, his yearning to possess her entirely for himself had become stronger by opposition. He suffered tortures during those weary months.

Outwardly he made no sign, he preserved a calm, cold mien, while inwardly he was consumed with a wild jealousy and despair. He would walk up and down the library in passionate misery. He told himself that she was cold, heartless, that she had never really loved him, or else the presence of the baby could not have changed her so completely, and he would go back to those sweet summer days when she had been his wholly and entirely, and he wished, aye, wished with fierce intensity, that

the child had never come to destroy that blissful time.

Olive did not realize the fires which were smouldering in her husband's breast. She was angry with him because he did not share her intense love for the child, and she was losing patience with his jealousy. She forgot in her maternal duties that she somewhat neglected those which she owed to him. The early morning walk with her husband was abandoned for her visit to the nursery, the evening talk in the library while he smoked was discontinued, because she must see that all was right with her child, and instead, she would linger by the cradle, and watch the tiny hands grasp hers, and listen to the soft cooing voice.

And, so the months rolled on. Sir Eustace would absent himself all day shooting or hunting. He was not a keen sportsman; at school and college he had cultivated his brains rather than his muscles; but he hated to be

at home, to see Olive near him, and yet to feel that in reality she was so far off.

“Perhaps if I am away she will miss me,” he said, “and be glad when I return.” But alas! she never uttered a word of regret at his absence, or of pleasure at his return. She only told him some story of the little Eustace, and his heart grew more hard and bitter within him, and his anger against the child gathered force.

The spring had come at last; a few snow-drops and hepaticas had pushed up their heads, and “a soft mist of green” hovered over the woods. Sir Eustace tried to feel a little hope grow up in his heart as he gazed at the awakening of nature. The spring contains such glorious possibilities. All seems within our grasp, those fanciful Elysian dreams appear almost to be ours, and no aspiration seems too high for us to reach.

But such hopefulness did not come to Sir

Eustace. The sun and the brightness gave him no comfort; rather did they make him more sad and dejected, for they reminded him of his lost happiness, and his jealousy grew with overwhelming rapidity.

There had been a few quite warm days at the beginning of March—days which made you wonder if the summer had made a mistake, or had taken compassion and come to cheer us before its time after the long, cold winter.

The child was nearly seven months old, it had grown, but had not strengthened; it was a fragile little thing, with its dark liquid eyes, and soft golden hair. It had been languid and peevish during the warm spring days, but the nurse had said it was only the spring time which made it feverish—nothing more.

But, alas! there was a deeper cause than the warm days and the spring time, for one morning the child grew suddenly worse, and lay feverish and breathless.

The doctor looked grave when he came, and then uttered that one terrible word—"Diphtheria."

The illness had been in the village hovering about like an evil spirit, and now it had swooped down upon that one precious treasure.

Olive stood white as a sheet as she listened to the doctor's words. "Was there any hope?" she asked at last, in a hard metallic voice.

The doctor looked at her in surprise; the tone was so cold; there was no outward sign of emotion except that the hand which grasped the rail of the little crib trembled, and the veins in her throat stood out visibly.

"We doctors are not infallible, Lady Devereux," he replied; "while there is life there is hope, but, my dear lady," and the old man looked kindly into Olive's face, "I must not disguise from you that it is a grave case; the child is so young and delicate."

"I know, I know," gasped Olive, hoarsely;

“but it cannot die—it shall not, it shall not,” and she threw herself down beside the cot, and caught the baby passionately in her arms, and then she rose and said, half wildly,

“Send for another opinion, do not delay, I beseech you ; send at once.”

The doctor acquiesced willingly, but as he watched Sir Eustace write the telegram he whispered,

“It is useless. Nothing less than a miracle can save your child.”

Sir Eustace sat staring in front of him after the doctor had left. Nothing short of a miracle can save the child ; it was going to die, and at first a feeling of pity and remorse came into his heart. He had hated it, wished it dead, and now God was going to take it ; and Olive, how would she bear it ? what would she do ? She had loved it with such an adoring love ; what would she do without it ? She would have nothing left—nothing

but—but—and a sudden vivid light flashed into his face and a feeling of exultant joy thrilled through him—nothing but himself. She would return to him, love him as of yore, and the joy seemed nearly to intoxicate him.

He sat for some minutes, lost in a happy dream, and then he rose and went softly upstairs into the sick room.

Olive knelt by the cot, she did not notice his entrance ; her eyes were rivetted upon the child, who lay with flushed cheeks in a troubled slumber.

Sir Eustace's heart smote him for the joy that he had felt, as he looked at that little pinched, fever-stricken face. How could he have been so merciless, so wanting in all human love, as to rejoice at the death of his own child ? It was awful, unnatural, and yet, his eyes turned again to Olive kneeling in her dark dress, her golden hair pushed from off

her forehead, and a look of agonised tenderness in her eyes.

The child was the price that must be paid for this woman's love, and again the passion revived, and again he felt that anything was worth sacrificing, no matter what, provided he regained her love.

Olive looked up as he approached.

"Eustace, I am so tired," she said faintly, "will you take my place for a little, and watch by him? You must paint his throat every half hour. Can you do it? remember it means life or death. I would not ask you," she added coldly, "but the nurse is lying down, and—I am so weary," and then as she reached the door she turned, and cried imploringly,

"You will be careful, and in an hour I shall return, I will not be longer," and then she tottered into the next room, and threw herself upon the bed.

Sir Eustace took her place beside the crib. The baby had awakened, and looked at him with wild, delirious eyes, and then moaned softly and rolled uneasily from side to side.

Why had Olive spoken so coldly to him? While the child lived she would never come back to him, and a dark, awful thought shot through his heart. What devil suggested such fiendish wickedness? Supposing the child recovered; Olive's love was lost for ever. As the child grew her love for it would grow, and each year would make her more engrossed, while, if it died—she would be his once more. There would be no one to stand between them, no one to rob him of her love; and he held the child's life in his hands. He was alone with it. No one would know if he failed to remove the membrane, and, after all, the doctor had said that there was no hope. It was simply a matter of hours. It was not murder,

for the child must die in any case ; it only meant shortening the pain.

He looked at the clock ; the time was drawing near when he should insert the brush. The child's breathing became more laboured, Sir Eustace turned his face resolutely away ; he could not bear to see the struggles ; he looked out at a dark cloud, which was emptying itself in a cool shower. The drops were flinging themselves against the window with a joyous patter, and then the rain ceased suddenly, and the peacocks began to screech.

Sir Eustace rose and paced the room with restless strides. It reminded him of the afternoon he had spent at Mr. Jones' side, listening with desperate horror to his ravings. The child was quieter ; it had fallen into a kind of stupor. It wanted three minutes yet to the time ; he took out his watch, and compared it with the clock, and then he peeped into the next room where Olive lay in a deep slumber.

Her hair had become unloosened, and fell about her like a cloud of gold, and there was a peaceful smile upon her face.

Sir Eustace leaned over her, and then he drew back in horror; how could he dare to press his lips to hers with that crime upon his soul? How could he ever dare to meet her eyes with the knowledge that he had let the child die, and she had trusted him, fearing nothing. He glanced again at her sleeping form, and while he looked she moved slightly, and murmured,

“Be sure you remember, it is life or death.”

The battle raged fiercely for one long agonizing minute, and then the better part of Sir Eustace's nature gained the victory. No, not even to gain her love could he succumb to this awful temptation. He went swiftly back into the child's room. It had awoke, and was battling for breath with a piteous convulsive movement. He took the brush, and quickly

and skilfully did as he had been instructed, and then he sank down on the chair, overcome by the fierceness of the struggle. His face was deathly, and cold beads of perspiration poured from his brow.

When Olive returned she found him still sitting in the same position, his head bent in deep abasement.

Now that the heat of the moment had passed he shuddered with horror and loathing at his own thought, where would this passion lead him? He had committed one heinous act for its sake, and now he had been about to take murder upon his soul. He dared not look at Olive; he stole out of the room, and out of the house on to the wild open moorland, and there he wandered hour after hour.

The fickle March sunshine had departed, and the air felt chill, and dark snow clouds drifted sullenly up from the horizon, and still he wandered on and on. He was horror-struck

by the enormity of his own thought, and he longed to make reparation.

When he re-entered the house it was four o'clock, and the London doctor had arrived; but even his skill was powerless to stem the tide which was sweeping that young life away.

The great man only shook his head, and repeated Dr. Eccles' words.

But still Olive refused to believe that her darling was doomed. She sat with the child on her lap, speechless with a great despair, and looking like some wan, beautiful Niobe. She heard and saw naught around her save the tiny drawn face with the wistful, imploring eyes.

"Olive darling!" Sir Eustace whispered, "you will wear yourself out. Give the child to me for a little time."

To see her suffer was torture. At that moment he would have laid down his life to

save her pain. But her words smote him with agony.

“No,” she moaned; “you do not love him. Let me keep him while I can, and afterwards, what matter? afterwards, when he is dead there is nothing—nothing—left.”

Sir Eustace turned away, a deep, wild anger rising in his heart. Why did she speak those cruel words to him? Had the child stolen all her affection? And the demon of jealousy returned, and he sat silent and moody, nursing the passion which threatened every moment to break forth. If she only knew the truth, would she mourn, he muttered. Would she not rather rejoice that the seal of her disgrace was gone?

An hour sped by and Dr. Eccles returned.

“It is sinking fast,” he said, “the struggle cannot last much longer. The poison is so malignant.”

“Is there no hope?” wailed Olive, “Can

nothing more be done? Oh, I beseech you, save his life! Oh, for the love of heaven!" and the tears broke from her eyes, and a convulsive sob shook her frame.

The old man hesitated.

"There is one last resource, but in this case, Lady Devereux, it is useless to try it."

"No, no!" cried Olive, "Try anything, anything."

"But it is risking the life of another," replied the doctor, looking round hesitatingly at Sir Eustace, who rose, and said in clear incisive tones,

"You mean the operation of tracheotomy, and then sucking the poison from the child's throat."

"Yes," replied the doctor, "the operation I am ready to perform, but sucking the poison from the child's throat is too perilous to life. I cannot risk it."

"Olive," said Sir Eustace, bending again

over his wife. "I am ready to do this if you wish it."

A sudden impulse came to him. In this way he could make reparation for that awful thought, and if he could save the child's life. he might regain her love.

Olive made no answer.

"But it is so deadly, Sir Eustace," argued the doctor, "it is ten chances to one that you take the illness, and in this case to run the risk would be all but useless."

"Olive," whispered Sir Eustace, "say, do you wish it?"

For a moment there was silence except for the laboured breathing of the child and the rhythmical tick of the clock.

"Lady Devereux, do not allow your husband to sacrifice his life!" exclaimed the doctor. "I tell you it is dangerous, terribly dangerous."

Olive made no answer. She looked in a

dazed way from one to the other, and then she broke into long passionate weeping.

Sir Eustace took the child resolutely from her arms, and beckoned to the doctor to follow him into the adjoining room.

“I am determined to try the operation,” he murmured, quickly and decisively; and then he added under his breath,

“If I give you back the child, Olive, darling, will you not give me back your love?”

* * * * *

The operation had been tried, but in vain. For an hour the child had rallied a little, and then it had sunk into a stupor.

It was six o'clock. The curtains were drawn, and a shaded lamp cast a pale light over the sick room. Olive still held the little unconscious burden.

Sir Eustace stood watching her, a mad despair possessing him. He had done all that was possible for her sake to save the

child, and yet she had not given him one kind word, one tender glance of gratitude.

She had allowed him to do this thing which was perilous to his life; she was so wrapped up in the child that she never thought of him. He told himself that she cared not if he lived or died provided the child was saved.

If she only knew the truth! and a wild evil desire came to him to tell her, to do anything to take her love from the baby. His head throbbed, and his blood seemed rioting through his veins with this mad desire, and some overwhelming force appeared to be spurring him on. He could bear anything rather than see her love for the child.

An hour passed, and the clock struck seven. Each stroke vibrated and echoed through the silent room. The wind had risen and was whistling round the house, and the fire was emitting a little hissing noise as if snow were falling down the chimney.

Suddenly the child seemed to awake from its stupor. It opened its eyes and stretched out its arms and tried to raise itself, and then with one long convulsive shiver, it fell back dead.

Olive uttered a low, piercing cry, and pressed it to her breast with agonized despair.

“It is dead,” whispered Sir Eustace, hoarsely, trying to take it from her; but she struggled, and cried:

“No, no! Let me keep it! It is all that is left to me,” and a spasm seemed to come in her voice, and she broke into loud piteous weeping, rocking herself backwards and forwards in her agony.

Sir Eustace was desperate, and he cried,

“Olive, you have me left. Can you not be comforted? Is not my love more to you than the child?” and he took the little dead body resolutely from her arms, and laid it on the bed.

“No,” she wailed, hardly knowing what she said. “No, it is my baby that I want, not your love. Give him back to me, give him back.”

Sir Eustace, clenched his hands. A frenzy overpowered him. She had said that his love was nothing compared to the child. She had told him that there was nothing left to her, and a storm of bitterest jealousy overwhelmed his reason. She should know the truth; she would not then mourn for the child. The passion mounted to his head; for the moment he was distraught. He forgot the fearful consequences, he forgot all, save one mad desire, that she should not grieve for the child. The words burst from him like some raging torrent that will not be stemmed, and they seemed to rend the air with their awfulness.

“Why mourn?” he cried. “You should rather rejoice, for the child was but an emblem of your disgrace. You are not my wife!”

The fatal words were uttered. They had gone forth, and there was no recalling them.

The instant they were spoken Sir Eustace realized the ghastliness of his position; he saw in one frightful agonized moment that by his senseless passion he had lost all, ruined his life.

They stood facing each other, the dead child between them, dividing them in death as it had done in life, its small calm face contrasting strangely with the wild passionate countenances of the man and woman who confronted one another.

There was a dead, awful silence, broken only by the ticking of the clock, and the hissing fire. Olive's face was grey as stone, and her voice seemed to come from far away.

“Not your wife!” she repeated. “Are you mad?”

And then suddenly a strange thing happened.

A wave of memory flashed through her mind—

The scene in the drawing-room at San Giovanni came vividly before her, and then Sir Eustace's emotion when she had asked for more details of the man Bryant. The room reeled, and the dead child's face seemed to rise from the bed and mock her, and then with one awful shriek she cried,

"Are you Bryant? the man whom the woman raved about that day in the cottage? Speak?" she muttered hoarsely, grasping the rails of the little crib, "speak, I adjure you!" Her breast heaved, and her eyes seemed flames of fire.

Sir Eustace cowered before her words. He was livid with agony, the passion had died from his face, and the lamp shed a ghastly pallor upon it. He tried to speak, but the words refused to be uttered. He put his hand to his throat as if he would draw them

forth, but nothing came but a long, gasping breath.

“For God’s sake, speak!” cried Olive, leaning across the crib, and gazing at him with eyes dilated, and mouth quivering with despair and agony.

As she gazed he lifted his eyes to her, and for one long minute they looked down into each other’s hearts, and then Olive’s hands relaxed their hold of the little crib, and with one desperate wail of agony, she sank back utterly overwhelmed by the awfulness of her position. In that one terrible moment she had read the truth.

Sir Eustace gazed silently at her with the bitterness of death encompassing him, and then he threw himself on his knees by her side and pleaded vehemently with her.

“Olive,” he gasped, “have mercy upon me; say that you forgive me.”

She looked up, her face grown suddenly old and haggard.

“Forgive,” she repeated in a hard, strained voice. “Forgive the man who has ruined my life.”

“But it was my great love, oh, listen,” and the words came pouring forth in a wild despairing stream.

“My great love. Ah! will you not understand? will you not believe? I fought against the temptation at first. I meant to go away, but that night—when we went out in the life-boat—you came to me and begged me not to go, and—and—I knew then that it was too late to flee, that I had gained your love, and—I was weak—I could not resist such temptation. No one knew about her. I brought no open disgrace upon you; before the world you were my wife, the other happened so long ago, and she was mad, hopelessly mad. Have you no forgiveness, no pity? It was through my

great love that I felt, Olive! Olive, have mercy upon me!" and he stretched out his arms to her.

But she sat, stern and unrelenting, her face stony, and her eyes fixed with a dull, dazed expression on the dead child.

She rose as he finished, and withdrew herself from his touch. And then she said, in low passionate tones,

"You call it love which could drag down the object to such depths. You call it love which could oblige the loved one to live a life of sin. You can desecrate the name of love by daring to give that holy name to your miserable passion. Day by day you have made my life a lie, a base, despicable lie. You had no compassion on my innocence, no remorse for the sin that you were making me commit; nothing but your own selfish desire, and I—" and she broke into an awful, reckless laugh, which

echoed and re-echoed in the silent chamber of death—

“I, my God! I believed in you—loved you—thought you ‘*Sans peur et sans reproche.*’ ” And then her voice broke into a wail of anguish, and she cried fiercely, “How dared you do this awful thing? How dared you live with me day by day, knowing that I was not your wife? How could you be so base, so vile? And the child—I understand now why you had no love for it. It could never have borne your name. It was ever there as a rebuke and reproach for your sin.”

“Olive,” he cried, “have mercy on me! I know my wickedness, but it was for love of you. I could not live without you; you were my life, my all. Have you no pity? Think what I suffered during those years tied to a mad woman, my life wrecked and lonely, and then suddenly brought under your sweet

influence. Have you no compassion for me? The temptation was overwhelming—and—the child—the reason I did not love it was the same, because it stole your love from me. I wanted it all, and each day you grew more cold, and drifted farther and farther from me, and I became desperate, and in my madness and jealousy the secret broke from me,” and he sank into a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

Olive stood still by the little crib. The child's face was so peaceful. Death had smoothed away the lines of suffering, and it looked like an angel, with the soft yellow locks making an aureole round its head, and the little hands clasped on its breast.

She did not move as Sir Eustace finished. She stood like a statue, her face cast from iron, and her hands locked in each other, and then slowly she turned and walked towards the door.

Sir Eustace sprang up, and planted himself in front of her.

“You shall not go!” he cried, in low, intense tones.

“Let me pass,” she said, her eyes cold as steel; “you have no power to detain me. Remember I am not bound to you by holy vows. I am free to depart, to go where I will.”

He fell back, with a low, stifled cry. His dream was realised, those awful words; his face was ashen.

“Have mercy, Olive,” he gasped, in a harsh, broken voice, “for the love of God, have mercy! Say that you forgive me,” and he stretched out his hands again imploringly.

“Forgive!” and she turned to him, a fierce light glittering in her eyes, and then she added in hard, flint-like tones, “I can never forgive—never—never—,” and then she turned once

more to the little crib, and stood gazing down on the dead child.

Sir Eustace shrank away before her scathing words ; he dared not approach her, and the chamber of death was silent. The fire hissed recklessly, and the clock struck eight slowly and deliberately, and the wind wailed, and then rushed against the window in hard, angry gusts.

Olive stood for one long minute, contemplating the angel face, and then she turned, and without one word, one glance, swiftly left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE stood for a minute outside the door stunned, dazed by the suddenness of the blow, and then she fled downstairs. The one feeling which possessed her was that she must flee away, far, far away, no matter where, providing she escaped from him, and from this house of sin.

As she passed through the hall she caught up a hat and shawl, and flung them hastily on her, and then she made her way to the drawing room, from whence she could reach the garden.

She paused for an instant as she entered the room. It looked so bright, so homelike. The

fire threw wavering shadows over the pictures and the quaint old furniture.

Was it possible that this awful thing could be a reality? Could it be true? Her husband, her child, both lost to her. Was it not some horrible nightmare, some frightful delirium? She looked wildly round, and then her glance fell on the picture of "The Path of Life."

A lamp threw a lurid glow upon it, and the figures seemed to stand out in strong weird prominence. The man appeared to hesitate no longer, she seemed to see him turn down the pleasant easy path of sin, and then, like a flash, the memory of that summer afternoon returned to her, when Sir Eustace had asked her to be his wife, and his words beat upon her brain, "Must we not sacrifice all for the sake of love?"

She understood them now, and a shiver ran through her, and then the perfume of

roses and white lilac floated towards her, and seemed to saturate the air, and mock her with its sweetness. Was it real or imaginary the subtle scent which brought that scene so vividly before her? She glanced around, and there on a small table stood a bunch of early Marechal Niels framed by white lilac. Olive tore the flowers from the vase, and trampled them savagely under her feet, and then sped out into the dark stormy night.

She paused for a moment, and looked up at the black pile of building, with its little turret towers, and the lights streaming from the windows. She had been so happy there—so happy, and a hard sob rose in her throat, and then she rushed on. A cold shower of hail dashed against her face, but she cared not. She saw, she felt nothing, but the quivering, desperate pain which seemed to burn, and throb, and tear her very heart out.

She had left the park and garden behind;

she was out now on the wild, desolate cliffs. On she went, mile after mile, once she heard voices near to her, and she withdrew behind the shadow of a bush until they had passed. They were only villagers—a youth and a girl; she heard their words, and they sent a fierce agony to her heart.

The man whispered, “Good night, Mary, to-morrow, darling, you will be my wife.”

The word was torture, and she caught her shawl more tightly round her, and sped on into the darkness, whither she cared not.

She was alone, absolutely alone. There was not a creature she could go to now, except Aunt Hannah; Nancy was miles away, and Aunt Prudence was dead, and a dry, gasping sob broke from her, as the awfulness of her position overcame her, and she sank down in her loneliness, and buried her face in her hands.

The wind rushed on its headlong course, and the hurrying clouds covered the sky with

murky blackness, and below the cliffs the waves roared, as they flung themselves upon the rocks and then recoiled with a long, hissing voice.

She was alone, and she cowered down in her misery, and a reckless despair came upon her. Why should she go on living? Why not cast herself over the cliff? It would be so quick, and—afterwards—it would be endless sleep or oblivion. There was no God. There could be no God to allow such terrible suffering.

She could not live with this awful disgrace upon her. She was no better now than the poor, fallen creatures from whom she had shrunk with horror and disgust; and the man who had brought this ruin upon her was he whom she had trusted with all her heart, and had thought upright, honourable, “*sans peur et sans reproche*,” and she burst into mad, hysterical laughter.

She had almost forgotten the child, the other pain seemed to have engulfed her, but now the little white figure rose up before her eyes. The soft, golden hair was blown about by the wind, and the face wore an expression of piteous anguish. One hand was raised, and appeared to her fevered imagination to point over the cliffs. She staggered to her feet, and tottered a few steps towards the vision with outstretched arms, but, as she approached, the figure moved to the edge of the precipice, and vanished, and she stood there alone on that awful brink, gazing down into that black, limitless abyss.

She heard the waves' mighty roar, as they thundered upon the shore, and then the clouds divided, and for an instant a pale ray of moonlight fell on those boiling, seething waters. She saw the whirling tide, the cruel curling crests, the white lapping tongues of foam, and the sharp, black

rocks lying like evil monsters waiting for their prey.

She drew a long, laboured breath, it would be over so soon, she must go, only one moment, and then rest. The waters seemed calling to her, a thousand voices rang in her ears ; the dark rocks, the white spray, the pale, sickly moonlight appeared to mingle in one blurred mass, and—then—she felt strong arms about her, and Mr. Jones' voice said, " Lady Devereux ! "

She struggled to free herself from his grasp.

" Let me go ! " she cried ; " I tell you it will only be a moment's suffering—and then—rest—rest—forgetfulness."

" Are you mad ? " he whispered, looking with agony into her white, set face.

" Mad ! No," she murmured, " No, she was mad—the other one, not I,—not I. But let me go," she implored, trying to free her-

self, "the pain is killing me, and there," and she pointed over the cliff, "there I shall forget. It will only be cold for a minute,—and afterwards—peace."

Mr. Jones gazed at her with terrified eyes. How came she here alone? What frightful thing had happened to upset her reason?

He pleaded with her gently. "Come," he said, "let me take you home. It is too rough for you to be out."

"Home!" she shrieked. "Home! I have none. I am alone—an outcast upon earth."

"Lady Devereux," he answered, sternly; "you have your husband—your child."

"Husband! Child!" she cried, mockingly; "I have neither. The child is dead, and—and—he was not my husband. Do you know? Do you understand?" and she grasped his arm. "I am not mad, only desperate."

Mr. Jones's face grew ashen, and his breath

came fast. Sir Eustace not her husband ! What had brought this awful delusion ?

“ Listen,” she whispered, hoarsely. “ Do you remember that day in the cottage last year ? The woman I went with you to see, who raved about a man named Bryant ? ” She stopped to gain breath.

Mr. Jones uttered an exclamation of dismay.

“ That man and Sir Eustace were the same person. He was married out in Australia long ago, but she went mad. Do you understand ? ”

Mr. Jones stood paralyzed with horror, and the word “ Scoundrel ! ” broke from his lips. Could it be true, this ghastly story, or was it merely the fabrication of her fevered brain ? But she stood there so calm ; the passion had expended itself, and the wild look had left her eyes.

“ Ask him if you do not believe,” she muttered low. “ You will find him there with

the body of the child. Go and ask him ;” and then the sense of her own loneliness came over her, and she said, “ but do not leave me yet.”

“ I will not leave you,” he said, vehemently. “ Let me take you to some place of shelter.”

“ But where can we go ? ” wailed Olive. “ I cannot go to Aunt Hannah with this shame and disgrace. I am alone. Oh ! take me far, far away from him. You saved my miserable life, but for what good, what good ? ” and her voice broke into passionate, uncontrolled weeping.

Mr. Jones stood by her silently, his heart was too full for speech, and he feared himself ; the temptation was so sore. He was alone with the woman he worshipped, adored, and she craved his help—pleaded for his protection. He had fought with this love that night before her wedding, and crushed it down, and now again it rose up and re-asserted itself. It told him that the world would be well lost

with her at his side ; that at this moment in her agony he could gain her consent to anything. But it was only for one minute that those evil thoughts flashed through his brain, and then he put it from him with loathing and horror, and he turned gently to Olive, and drew her hand through his arm.

“Come,” he said, “there is one I can take you to, who is humble in position, but she has the kindest heart, and she need know nothing but that you are in trouble. She is my mother’s old maid, and she lives in Ilchester. Her nature is a little like Miss Prudence’s.”

“Oh ! if she were only alive !” whispered Olive ; “but I am alone—alone.”

They spoke little after that ; the strain was telling upon Olive, those days and nights of anxiety, and at the end that crushing, overwhelming blow. She stumbled along, her limbs feeling heavy as lead.

“I cannot go any further,” she said at last.

“Only as far as those lights,” he whispered. “That is St. Vinyard’s. The train leaves there at half past nine.”

She staggered on, and a few minutes brought them to the little station with its dim flickering gas lamps, and small squalid waiting-room.

Olive shrank into a corner, and gazed absently at the flaring advertisements that hung round.

There was one of an excursion train to Plymouth, with a gaudy picture of the town, and there was another brilliant red placard denoting a flower show that was to be held the next day. She looked at the words in a stupified dull way. She had promised to attend the flower show, and help to distribute the prizes, and now—and now— She turned her face away, and leaned it against the wall.

A woman came in presently with a baby, and began wringing the wet from her clothes and from the child’s. Olive watched the drops

trickle down from her umbrella into a little pond on the dirty oilcloth, and then she heard the woman say :

“ It be a desperate bad night, and you look starved to death.”

She did not answer ; she only shrank more into the corner. And then the child stretched out its arms and stroked the wet dress, and said softly, “ Poor—poor,” and its little hood fell back, and disclosed a head of golden curls.

Olive uttered a low cry, and started to her feet. It was so like her own baby, she could not bear to see it, and she walked hurriedly away, and stood by the door, a fierce despair thrilling her. Why should that woman be so happy, and she so miserable, her life wrecked, ruined, disgraced ? and scalding tears started to her dry eyes, and the advertisements danced and swayed before her.

Mr. Jones came to her at that moment, and said gently, “ The train is coming,” and then

he drew her hand again within his arm, and they went out on to the little dripping platform.

There was as much bustle as could be made by one porter with a hoarse voice and a bell. There was a flash of many lights, a shrill whistle, and Olive and Mr. Jones found themselves alone in a carriage, gliding swiftly away through the darkness.

Mr. Jones did not speak ; he was terrified by her ashen, haggard face. She sat there as one paralyzed, her eyes wide open, and staring into space, with an expression of utterly hopeless despair.

Once she spoke, in dull hard tones, “ Why did you prevent me from casting myself over the cliff ? Why did you not let me die and go into oblivion, and forgetfulness ? Oh, God ! ” she cried, “ must I bear this agony for ever ? Is there no peace ? ” and she wrung her hands in desperation, and then sat silent.

Mr. Jones uttered no word. He knew how futile is speech in mental pain such as hers, and that kindly actions are all that we can offer.

There was a flash of lights, and a buzz of voices, and Olive found herself being piloted through the crowded station at Ilchester. A minute more, and they were in the street. The gas lamps flickered, and flared in the wind; the gutters were roaring torrents, and the pavement streamed with wet. Mr. Jones strove to shelter her from the rain; it was only a few steps, and two minutes' walk brought them to their destination.

Olive clutched Mr. Jones' arm as they reached the steps, a sudden faintness came over her. The door was opened by an old woman with a round, sunny face, soft pink cheeks, and black cap with pink ribbons.

"Law, Mr. Harold!" she cried, holding up her hands, "whatever brings you out on such a

night ? ” and then, catching sight of Olive, she made an exclamation of surprise.

Mr. Jones whispered something hurriedly in her ear, and she led the way into a warm comfortable little room.

Olive tottered after her, and then sank down half unconscious.

“ Poor lamb ! ” said the old woman kindly ; “ poor lamb, she does look bad ! ” and she began to chafe Olive’s cold hands, and then she poured her out a cup of tea from a teapot which stood on the table.

But Olive turned away, and sat staring vacantly into the fire. Mr. Jones drew Mrs. Brandon outside.

“ Jane,” he said, “ I have a favour to ask, I want you to do something for me.”

“ I am sure I’ll do anything I can to please you, Mr. Harold,” she answered.

“ That lady,” he continued, his voice trembling with emotion, “ is in terrible

trouble, and, for reasons that I cannot explain to you she has nowhere to go ; will you keep her here for a few days ? until—until—” and he broke off feebly.

“ Surely, Mr. Harold, surely I’ll keep her ; you know I’d do any mortal thing for you, and I’ll do my best to make the poor thing comfortable ; but she seems in a sad plight.”

“ Thank you, Jane,” he said, taking the old woman’s hand, and pressing it gratefully ; “ I knew that you would help me.”

“ It is only a pleasure, Mr. Harold, to do anything for you,” and the woman’s eyes moistened, and she looked lovingly into his face.

“ I must go now,” he said, wearily, turning again to the room where Olive was ; “ to-morrow I shall be back.”

As he entered the door she rose from her chair, and said, “ Must you go ? Cannot you stay with me ? I am so alone—alone.”

“To-morrow morning I will return,” he replied, softly ; “and till then Jane will take care of you.”

He held her cold hand in his, and looked down with terrible agitation into her pleading face. How he longed to stay with her—comfort her—help her !

“Thank you,” she said, suddenly ; “thank you for all—your kindness—and—and—one day, perhaps, I may thank you for my life, but not now—not now,” and she sank back again in the chair, her face grey and drawn with suffering.

Mr. Jones paused for a moment when he reached the street. Was it a reality, that last fearful hour, or was it only a ghastly dream ? He put his hand before his eyes, and tried to shut out the gruesome sight of Olive upon that cliff, her figure poised upon that awful brink, preparatory to casting herself into that black gulf, one moment more, and he would

have been too late, and he shuddered with horror.

And now what was to be done? He must go to Sir Eustace, and tell him she was safe. His face darkened as he thought of him. How dared he bring this ruin upon her? And then he thought of the woman's words that day in the cottage; why had he not believed them? Why had he not tried to find out Bryant? He had asked Sir Eustace, and he had lied to him, and the word "Scoundrel" again broke from his lips.

How could a man be so vile, so despicable? and yet—to gain Olive's love he almost understood it. Had not wild thoughts rushed through his brain that moment on the cliff, and who was he to judge another?

He must go to "The White Ladies" to-night; the cathedral clock chimed ten; it wanted still five minutes before the last train

left, and he hurried on, and elbowed his way into the crowded station.

* * * * *

Sir Eustace sat as one paralysed when Olive left him. He was struck down, overwhelmed by the awful consequences of his own hasty words. How he cursed himself for his madness, for his passionate uncontrolled temper! What devil could have possessed him in that wild moment? And he groaned aloud in his agony, and writhed in his despair.

The fire had died down, and the room was dark, except for the dim rays of the lamp; which fell with ghostly radiance on the face of the dead child.

Sir Eustace rose and walked to the little crib, and looked down on the still, white face with the tangled, golden locks. He shivered as he gazed.

“The rebuke, the reproach for my sin,” he murmured, and then he crept out of the room

down to the library. He paused as he passed Olive's door; he dared not enter; he could never approach her again. That beautiful life was shattered, and by his own hand, and now — she would leave him — but whither would she go?

She had been mother, and not wife, and the disgrace which he had brought upon her suddenly overwhelmed him. In his first agony he had forgotten her position, but now it burst upon him in all its awfulness. He knew her too well to dream it possible that she would continue that life of falsehood and sin, even to save herself from outward shame, and he was powerless to help her, powerless to make reparation whilst his mad wife lived. He had dragged her down wantonly into this desperate strait; he saw the baseness of his own actions, the consequences of his own selfish, mean desires, and he sank, crushed by the blackness of his own crime.

He was roused at length from his terrible thoughts by a knock at the door, and Williams the butler came in. He was an old and trusted servant, and had been with Sir Eustace ever since his return from Australia.

“I beg pardon, Sir Eustace,” he said deferentially, “but the postman has just brought this letter. It was overlooked this morning in the sorting, and as it had ‘immediate’ upon it, they sent it up thinking as it might be important.”

“Put it down,” said Sir Eustace wearily.

The servant did as desired, and retreated to the door.

Sir Eustace’s eyes looked absently at the letter, which Williams had laid down beside him, and then he uttered an exclamation and caught it up. It bore the name of the agent who forwarded all the Australian communications. His fingers trembled as he opened the envelope; inside was a telegram directed to

E. Bryant, Esquire. He tore it from its covering, and spread it out before him.

He read the words over and over again, before he mastered the sense, and then he started up, and cried, "My God! I am free! But it has come too late—too late!" and the paper fluttered to the ground at his feet, and his eyes still rivetted themselves upon the words, "Rose Bryant died this morning." Dead—his mad wife dead. He was free, but too late, and he muttered an oath, and sat with his haggard face convulsed and livid with passion.

He knew not how long he sat there; it might have been years. The clock chimed something, and Bogie began moaning in his sleep, when the door opened again, and Williams entered.

"If you please, Sir Eustace, Mr. Jones has called, and wishes to see you most particularly."

“Mr. Jones,” repeated Sir Eustace, in a dazed voice, “Mr. Jones!”

“Yes, Sir Eustace,” and the young man pushed past Williams, and walked into the room.

There was a moment’s silence as the door closed, and the two men found themselves alone.

The memory of that night after his accident, when he had asked Sir Eustace about Bryant flashed through Mr. Jones’ mind. He seemed to hear again the mellow splash of the fountain outside, and the crash of the Sèvres vase as it toppled from its pedestal. He understood now how the accident happened, as he gazed on the man who had worked this havoc with Olive’s life, and a fierce resentment possessed him. How dared he have stretched out his fettered hand to take her free one? He struggled with the violent agita-

tion that thrilled him, and then he said sternly—

“ I came to tell you that she is safe.”

“ Safe!” repeated Sir Eustace. “ She is here, upstairs.”

“ No! she has left you.”

“ Left me!” the words seemed like the cry of a lost soul, so unutterable was the bitterness and despair that vibrated through them.

Mr. Jones felt a touch of compassion for the wretched man before him, but he said, coldly—

“ How could she remain after she knew the horrible truth? ”

“ But where has she gone? ” cried Sir Eustace, hoarsely, “ tell me, I beseech you,” and he lifted his head and looked with unspeakable anguish into the young man’s face.

Mr. Jones started as he met those pang-stricken eyes. Could a few hours have wrought such a change in a face? It was

grey with anguish, and there were black shadows under the eyes, and deep lines round the mouth.

“Tell me,” he gasped again, “tell me;” and then, the old wayward passion rising, he cried fiercely, “you shall tell me, I have a right to know.”

“She is at Ilchester,” replied Mr. Jones, “but what right have you to know?” and then his rage burst out. His compassion for the man was drowned in his anger. “You who have brought this awful thing upon her—you who have acted this dastardly part—my God! how could you do it?” The enormity of the deed suddenly breaking more fully upon him. “How could you dare to drag that pure soul into such a life—dare to come to God’s altar, and swear a lie? Was all honour, all truth dead in you? Had you no thought but for your own mean, passionate desires? No thought for the woman you

were obliging to live a life of sin and shame?

“Do you remember the night here in this room when I asked you about Bryant, the man about whom the dying woman had raved? Do you remember your answer? You were standing by that window with the moonlight playing on the steps, and the shattered vase lying at your feet. I can see it all now, and your answer was, ‘I never heard the name’—scoundrel that you are!”

Mr. Jones’ face was flushed, and his voice trembled with scorn, as he uttered the last words. A sudden sense of his own wrong rose up. This man had spoilt his life as well as hers; if it had not been for him, perhaps—perhaps—she might have cared for himself.

Sir Eustace cowered before the stinging reproaches, and then he muttered, “I loved her so. I struggled at first, but—but—the

temptation was too strong for me, and I fell."

"And dragged her down with you," exclaimed Mr. Jones. "And now, what is to become of her? Have you thought of that? The life you have ruined and disgraced, and no reparation in your power."

"But there is a possible reparation!" cried Sir Eustace, a sudden light breaking over his face, "read that," and he thrust the telegram into Mr. Jones' hand. "My wife is dead, I am free," and he breathed hard, "but it comes too late; she will never come back to me—never—it is too late," and he buried his face in his arms, and a broken sob burst from him.

"You can marry her, give her your name?" Mr. Jones asked breathlessly.

Sir Eustace made a sign of assent, and then there was a dead silence, except for his long quivering sobs.

A torrent of feelings swept through Mr.

Jones. This woman whom he loved, who had clung to him in her misery and despair—it was his lot to give her back to the man who had wronged her so bitterly. It was awful ; and yet, how could he hesitate ? It was the only way to save her good name. It must be done ; and then the thought flashed through him, could it not be arranged without any one knowing about this fearful night ?

“ Sir Eustace,” he said quickly, “ do the servants know that—that—she has gone ? ”

“ No, they think she is in her room,” he muttered.

“ Listen ! ” cried Mr. Jones, grasping his arm. “ Can it not be managed so that none but ourselves shall know of this awful time ? ”

“ How ? ” muttered Sir Eustace, looking up. “ She will not marry me now ; she will never come back—never—never—”

“ But she shall,” exclaimed Mr. Jones. “ You must make her your wife—give her

your name, and—and—afterwards ? ” he murmured, “ —afterwards God knows what you can do, but before the world you must save her good name.”

“ I will do anything, anything,” whispered Sir Eustace.

“ Have you any old servant in the house that you can trust, really trust ? ”

“ Yes, Williams has been with me for years.”

“ Send for him, then,” exclaimed Mr. Jones, “ and tell him that she has left the house, make any excuse ; say that her grief for the child had turned her brain a little, and, it is true,” he continued harshly ; “ no one would cast themselves over the cliffs who was not mad for the moment.”

“ Cast herself over the cliffs,” gasped Sir Eustace, looking wildly into his face. “ Is it true ? Why did you not tell me ? ”

“ Because I could not ; it was too awful,”

and Mr. Jones covered his face with his hands. "I was only just in time," he muttered, "just in time. I was walking home after a long round, and I saw a figure standing on the edge of Dead Man's Cavern; the moonlight flashed down upon it, and I saw her face white and shining, and—"

Sir Eustace sprang up, and uttered a cry which Mr. Jones never forgot, it was ghastly in its bitterness, and then he fell back on the sofa, unconscious.

When Sir Eustace recovered, Mr. Jones and Williams were kneeling beside him, and he whispered feebly to Mr. Jones, "Tell him anything, only for God's sake save her."

Mr. Jones took Williams aside, and told him of Olive's flight. He put it upon her grief for the child's death. "No one in the house must know of this; it is of the gravest importance that it should remain a secret; can you arrange it?"

“Yes, sir, I will tell the servants as Sir Eustace took my Lady to some friends near, as soon as the baby died, as she seemed so wild, and they’ll none of them know to the contrary, for the nurses were lying down, and her ladyship’s maid is away on a holiday. Never fear, sir, I’ll manage it, I’d do anything to serve Sir Eustace and my Lady.”

Mr. Jones gave a sigh of relief, and then he turned to Sir Eustace, who had fallen again into a half unconscious state; his face looked deathly, and his breath came in laboured gasps.

“Send for Dr. Eccles,” he said to Williams; “I am afraid your master is seriously ill.”

Sir Eustace opened his eyes once, and said, “Do not let me die till—till I have given her my name. Send for the—”

Dr. Eccles shook his head when he came, and said, “I hope it is only fatigue and anxiety, but—but I fear diphtheria. Sir

Eustace would try to save the child's life by sucking the poison from its throat; I told him it was dangerous but he insisted."

"I did it for her sake," whispered Sir Eustace to Mr Jones, "for her sake."

All night he tossed on a bed of pain, and in the morning he was worse. Mr. Jones never left him; he watched by him hour after hour till the daylight strayed in through the closed shutters. It had been a terrible night, as he looked back at those hours in after years, he wondered at the strength which had been vouchsafed to him. As the clock struck eight he rose.

"Are you going?" whispered Sir Eustace.

"Yes," he answered, "I am going to her."

A spasm of agony swept over the sick man's face, and he gripped the young man's hand, and said, "Do not delay the ceremony; better on my death bed than not at all, and it is better so perhaps, that I should die, and—and it was

for her sake that I tried to save the child. I have brought this evil to her life, but I have given mine for her sake," and he turned his head away on the pillow.

Mr. Jones' eyes were wet, as he walked down the broad staircase, and out into the morning air. Once again he was called on to perform that ceremony, once again! But what different circumstances attended it! How different from that bright September morning! And Olive's face rose up before him, as she looked in her bridal dress, with all the tender possibilities in her eyes,—and then he saw her as she looked last night, her figure poised on that awful crag, and her face distorted by the reckless despair which possessed her.

CHAPTER IX.

“How is she?” inquired Mr. Jones eagerly, as Mrs. Brandon opened the door to him.

The old woman shook her head, “Poor lamb, she just seems broken-hearted, Mr. Harold, just broken-hearted. She sits there with her eyes staring at nothing, and a look, as if—” and the good woman wiped her own eyes—“as if life were all over for her; it breaks my heart to see her, poor dear, and so young, so young.”

Mr. Jones entered the room softly. Olive was sitting as Mrs. Brandon described; she did not move or look up as he approached till he murmured a greeting, and

then she raised her eyes, and held out her hand.

“You have come at last,” she said wearily ;
“it seemed so long, so long.”

Mr. Jones sat down by her side, and looked tenderly into the white set face. It appeared shrunk and pinched and the eyes burnt with a feverish lustre.

“What am I to do ?” she wailed piteously.
“What is to become of me ? Why did you save my wretched life ? I should have been at rest, and now, this pain it will never cease.”

Mr. Jones’ heart ached for her suffering, and again he felt a passionate resentment rise against the man who had dared to bring this misery upon her. How could he be his ambassador, how could he counsel her to return to him ? and yet there was no other course, everything must be done to save her good name.

“ I have seen him,” he said at last, in a low voice.

She made no answer, but her face hardened, and her hands grasped the arms of the chair.

“ He is ill,” Mr. Jones continued, watching the effect of his words, “ the doctor fears that he has caught—”

A sharp spasm contracted her brows, and she whispered hoarsely “ Not the diphtheria.”

Mr. Jones made a sign of assent.

“ If he should die,” she cried breathlessly, “ it would be my fault ; I could have stopped him from making the experiment, but—but—the child—the child,” and her face relaxed, and tears gushed from her eyes. “ I loved it so—it was a last chance, and—I could think of nothing but my child.”

Mr. Jones sighed, and turned away. He had a hard mission to perform, and how was he to begin ? He looked round the cheerful little room, and strove to prepare his words.

A bright fire blazed in the grate, and two kittens lay on the hearth locked in each other's embrace, and a cage with a bullfinch hung in the window.

He looked absently from the kittens to the bullfinch, and from the bullfinch back to Olive. And then he said,

“ I have something very strange to tell you. something that concerns your future.”

She made no reply, but she turned her white face towards him.

“ Last night,” he continued, “ after—after—you had left Sir Eustace—” her face hardened again, and her fingers wound themselves more tightly round the chair. Mr. Jones hesitated for a moment, and then he proceeded, “ Sir Eustace received a telegram from Australia.”

She gave a start, and an expression of anguish darted into her eyes.

“ The telegram said that—” and his voice

quivered with agitation—"that she—his wife—was dead."

There was a silence ; Olive sat rigid ; the fire shifted in the grate, one of the kittens turned over in his sleep, and the bullfinch's little claws made a sharp thud as he jumped backwards and forwards from perch to perch.

"Do you understand ?" he whispered. "He is free." The words appeared to linger in the air with a long joyous ring. And then Olive muttered bitterly,

"How does his freedom concern me ? The past cannot be undone. He deceived me, lied to me, dragged me down to an existence no better than—than—" and her voice died away in a whisper. "He made the holiest part of my life a lie, a sin. The evil that he did cannot be effaced ; his freedom comes too late—too late," and she bowed her head, and looked into the fire with a drear, desperate despair.

"But he can make you reparation,"

whispered Mr. Jones. "Now that he is free he can give you his name."

She started to her feet, her face ablaze with passion, and her eyes flashing with anger. "And you would have me go back to him?" she cried, vehemently; "go back to the man who has wrought this destruction to my life, brought this shame upon me! You would have me marry him now, after—after—the terrible past?"

Mr. Jones turned and walked to the window. A tumult of feelings rushed through him; he could not meet her bitter, scornful gaze. In his heart he would not have her return to the man who had brought this evil upon her, but it must be. By no other means could her honour be saved.

"Do not tell me that I must go back," she said imploringly, laying her hand upon his arm. "Take me far away, where I shall never see him more, and where I may forget."

His heart throbbed at her touch, and wild thoughts fled through his brain. He hesitated ; the bullfinch was piping “ Home, sweet home,” and one of the kittens had climbed on to the table, and was walking gingerly between the ornaments. A home with Olive. The thought was rapture, and thrilled him through and through. She might grow to love him in the future, and they would go away to some distant land where the past was not known, where—There was a crash ; the kitten had knocked down a vase, and it lay shattered on the carpet. The spell was broken. Mr. Jones recoiled at his own thoughts ; how could he let himself dream anything so base ? He who had judged Sir Eustace with such severity ; was he not meditating something nearly as evil ? For the sake of his own desires he would sacrifice her good name, he would let a slur rest upon it that could never be removed.

He turned—a sudden strong resolution in his face, and said, in grave incisive tones, “I do counsel you to return to Sir Eustace; let him make the reparation which he is willing, aye, eager to make.”

Olive looked at him with a wild feverish gaze, and then she murmured,

“Go back to the old life, the life which is dead, which nothing can revive? Live day after day with that past staring me in the face. No, never—never—” and she sank down again into the chair, and muttered, “Let me go away, anywhere, only far away.”

Mr. Jones’ face grew stern and set; the task was almost too hard, but it must be fulfilled.

He bent over her, and whispered, “You must marry him for the sake of your honour, and for your life afterwards,” and his voice broke, “God will help you.”

Olive sat as one in a dream. The kitten

was hanging on to the table-cloth, and let itself down with a dull thud, and the bullfinch hopped merrily backwards and forwards.

“For the sake of your honour!” The words seemed to repeat themselves with horrible emphasis. But surely her honour was gone, they must all know of her flight. She murmured the question.

No one except myself knows the reason of your absence,” replied Mr. Jones. “They have been told that you were so overwrought with grief that Sir Eustace took you away quietly that evening to some friends. None need ever know, but ourselves. The marriage will be by special licence, and your good name will be safe, and the secret I will keep faithfully all my life.”

Still she sat silent, her face working with agitation. One of the kittens suddenly leaped on to her lap, and began playing with a part

of her dress, but she did not appear to notice it.

Mr. Jones stood watching her intently, his hands clenched, and his eyes glistening with his emotion. There was one other argument left, but it was a hard and bitter one for him to speak, and yet, if all others failed, he must try it. He waited several minutes, the kitten had got up on to the back of the chair and was rubbing itself softly against Olive's neck ; she paid no heed, but sat as one paralyzed. Once or twice her lips moved, but no sound issued forth, her eyes were stony in their hardness. Mr. Jones gave a hardly suppressed groan ; he must brace himself to make one more effort.

Oh ! the irony of fate, that it should fall to his lot to plead Sir Eustace's cause ! And then with an effort he whispered :

“ Have you no love left for this man ? Is all your affection dead ? Have you no forgiveness ? Remember, though his sin was terrible,

he fell from his great love for you, and—should he die—” she uttered a low exclamation—“remember he gave his life for the sake of the child. He pleads with you now for forgiveness ; he offers you all the reparation that it is possible for him to give. Have you no mercy, no pity?” and his voice thrilled with his earnestness. “Remember that we all fall short of what God would have us be, and who are we to judge another? How can we say that had a like temptation been offered to us that we should not have fallen?” He paused, his agitation overcame him for a moment, and then he cried aloud,

“For God’s sake I beseech you pause, consider my words! Your whole future depends upon your decision—”

“Give me time,” she murmured, “time—leave me to-day. To-morrow perhaps, to-morrow—”

Mr. Jones leaned against the wall as he closed

the door behind him. His brain reeled, the strain had been so great, the fray so fierce, the battle with his own feelings so awful, and the battle with her so hard to win; but he had won. He saw in her face that he had conquered; she had not told him so in words, but he had seen the softening in her eyes, and heard the tremble in her voice.

“Are you ill, Mr. Harold?” asked Mrs. Brandon’s voice, close to him, “you look so white.”

“No, no, I am not ill,” he replied; “only tired.”

“You work too hard, Sir; your landlady, Mrs. Haiden, she be quite right; you young gentlemen never think, you just go ahead at things so.”

“No, Jane, it is not that exactly; but I have been worried,” and then suddenly changing his tone, he said gravely,

“I want more help from you, Jane. I know you can hold your tongue.”

“Yes, Mr. Harold, I can do that pretty fair, I think,” replied the woman complacently.

“I want you to stand witness to a marriage,” continued Mr. Jones.

“Not a runaway match, Sir?” inquired the old lady, looking startled and rather shocked.

“No,” he replied hesitatingly; “no; only a marriage in which there was some irregularity, and which necessarily has to be performed over again.”

“Good gracious! and is it to do with the poor thing in there?”

Mr. Jones nodded.

“I’m sure as I’d do any mortal thing to help her. When may it take place, Mr. Harold?”

“In a few days,” the young man replied, and then he put his hands on the old woman’s shoulders, and said solemnly,

“Jane, promise me, for my mother’s sake,

that you will keep this secret faithfully all your life.”

“ I promise, Mr. Harold ; I promise as it shall never pass my lips.”

Olive sat quite still after Mr. Jones left her. She leaned her head back against the chair, and cried softly. The tears relieved her, they took the aching pain from her heart.

Did she still love Sir Eustace? Was it possible? She had told herself that every scrap of affection was dead, that she never wished to see his face nor hear his voice again—and yet—was it true? Woman’s love is hard to kill. It clings with firm intensity, even where the object is utterly unworthy, and Olive, as she probed her heart, felt that under all her anger, all her scorn, there yet lingered love ; dimmed, tarnished, the first lustre gone, the bloom of trust brushed away, but not dead. That spark which leaps so suddenly into flame and is so hard to extinguish, it was there,

buried under the weight of despair and shame, but still there, in the deepest recesses of her heart.

* * * * *

Three days passed away, and Sir Eustace grew worse rather than better. The doctor pronounced the poison of such a malignant kind that he feared the patient's strength could not hold out.

On the third day there was a decided change for the worse. Sir Eustace lay tossing all the night, and in the morning he whispered to Mr. Jones,

“The marriage, it must be to-day. Pray her to come, let me do all that lies in my power for reparation. Bring her quickly—quickly,” and he looked with fever-stricken eyes at the young man, and then as Mr. Jones turned he muttered, “The witnesses. Have you thought of that?”

“Yes,” replied the clergyman; Mrs. Bran-

don, my mother's old maid, whom she is with, and Williams."

"And what have you told them?" the sick man asked eagerly.

"Simply that there had been an irregularity in your first marriage, and that you wished the ceremony performed over again, but as secretly as possible, and they have sworn to silence."

"Thank you," Sir Eustace muttered hoarsely. "You have been a true friend to me, and I can never be grateful enough. When I am gone," and he hesitated, "be good to her."

Mr. Jones could not answer, but he pressed Sir Eustace's hand, and hurried from the house.

The last three days had been like an evil dream to him, like some ghastly nightmare. He had seen Olive once; it had been a short painful interview. She appeared completely crushed by the awfulness of her position,

which as each day passed broke more fully upon her. But he had gained her assent to come when he should fetch her.

“Jane,” he said, as the old woman opened the door to him, “will you come and fulfil your promise?”

She nodded assent, and he passed into the room where Olive sat.

“I have come to fetch you,” he said, simply; and then very gently and tenderly he told her that there was no hope, and that she must hasten.

“And it is I who have killed him!” she cried, rocking herself backward and forward; “he tried to save the baby for my sake. Oh, God! forgive me! It was my fault—my fault!”

“Hush!” whispered Mr. Jones; “he insisted upon doing it—and the doctor thinks that the seeds of the disease were there before, and that the experiment on the child only

accelerated it. But come," he murmured, "we waste time, and the moments are so precious."

She staggered to her feet, her face ghostlike in its pallor.

"Yes, come," she muttered, "come."

Through the long drive she sat like a statue, except for the feverish light which burnt in her eyes, and the restless workings of her hands.

Williams opened the door, and she walked firmly into the house, and upstairs, and then, as she reached his room, she faltered and shrank back.

"I cannot go in," she whispered to Mr. Jones, "that last awful night is before my eyes. I see it all as we stood there with the dead child between us, and now—take me away," and she held out her arms to him. "Oh! take me away."

Mr. Jones caught his breath sharply, and

then he took her hand kindly but firmly in his, and led her to the door, and pushed her gently into the room.

“Olive,”—the voice was so changed she hardly recognized it—“can you forgive me? It is so hard to die without your forgiveness. I have sinned against you grievously, but, my God, I loved you so!”

She had stood quite still for a moment, and then she cast herself down upon her knees beside the bed, and wept.

“Eustace,” she cried, “it is I who have killed you! I was so selfish, I thought only of the child, and I let you risk your life, and now—now—”

“Hush!” he murmured, “it was all my own doing. I did it to regain your love. I thought that if I saved the child’s life you would be to me as you had been, and then my jealous passion drove me mad, and I confessed the awful thing that I had done.” He took

her hand in his hot feverish ones, and murmured,

“Have mercy on me, Olive; let me make the only reparation that is possible. Let me give you my name. If I had lived I would not have troubled you with my presence, I would have gone far away; but now I am dying. It is better so, you will be free to begin a new life, and God grant that it may be a happier one.”

A sob broke from her, and she whispered,

“There is no new life possible for me. The old one was so beautiful till—till—the child divided us, and then—” and she buried her face in the bed, and cried silently.

Sir Eustace stretched out his arm and drew something from under the coverlet—his violin.

“Olive,” he said. “do you remember that evening at Florence, when Corio told us the story of the Ranieris? Do you remember

that after they were gone we had some music together, you and I, and at the end we played ‘Lohengrin?’ Do you recollect your words? They have lingered in my ears ever since, ‘I would forgive you almost anything if you played me that air.’”

Slowly and painfully he raised the violin to his shoulder, and a few bars of that dreamy, exquisite melody floated through the silent room.

Olive raised her tear-stained face, and looked spellbound at Sir Eustace. His countenance had a rapt expression, and his eyes flashed with a new, strange light. The notes seemed wafted on the air like some angelic cadence. Each dulcet tone thrilled through the broken hearts of the man and woman and soothed them with a heavenly peace. The music ceased suddenly, and the violin fell from his trembling hands.

Olive put her arms about him, and whispered

words which illumined his dying face, and then he murmured,

“Let the marriage be now, the time is so short—so short.”

Very sad and solemn was that little service. Mrs. Brandon and Williams stood together a little apart, the latter quite overcome by his emotion, and the former crying out of sympathy.

Olive knelt beside the bed, her hand clasped in Sir Eustace's and his eyes gazing into hers with long yearning glances.

Mr. Jones' voice quivered, as he read those beautiful but terrible words which bind two souls together in the sacred bonds of matrimony. “In sickness and in health, till death us do part.” How doubly solemn they seemed in the presence of the dark angel who was hovering round! How doubly awful when pronounced over the dying man, and the fair young girl, her head bowed down by grief,

and her heart crushed by the agony which had fallen upon her.

The last words were uttered, the blessing given, and Sir Eustace and Olive were man and wife. Mr. Jones cast a long lingering glance at them, and then he turned and stole away for the second time, and left them alone.

* * * * *

How fleetly did those last hours speedaway !

The day faded, the sun sank into the golden horizon, and a velvet haze fell softly over the landscape.

Sir Eustace's life was ebbing fast away. The greyness of death was overspreading his features, and his eyes were growing dim.

"You will live here, my darling," he murmured. "I have made a new will and left you everything, and you love 'The White Ladies.' We were very happy here once," he went on dreamily ; "so happy that

—that—I thought heaven itself could not be better. You forgive me; say it once more. Let me hear it once again.”

For a moment Olive could not speak, the tears choked her utterance, and then she cried, “Oh, Eustace! it is I who have killed you. I—who—”

“Hush!” he interrupted sternly; “you shall not say those words. Listen! Had you wished me not to try the experiment, I would still have done it, Olive; it was my duty. When I am gone, promise that you will not dwell upon that awful thought; promise me, my wife,” and he drew her closer to him, and looked pleadingly into her face, and then sank back exhausted.

* * * * *

“It is getting so dark, Olive,” he whispered, stretching out his hands; “are you there? Call Mr. Jones, I would wish him farewell.”

She rose mechanically, and went to the door, and beckoned to the young man to approach.

“Pray for me,” muttered Sir Eustace, as the clergyman bent over him, “and—and—I thank you with all my heart, I thank you for all that you have done. Be a friend to her, take care of her, I beseech you; I leave her in your care.”

A stifled sob broke from the young man, and then he knelt and prayed—aye, prayed as he had never prayed before. The partition that divides us from the great unseen appeared swept away, and he seemed to stand with that departing soul on the very threshold of eternity.

* * * * *

“Olive, my wife, my wife, come near to me. It is all dark now except for one little streak of light. Your forgiveness, say it once more—once more. Let me die with that in my

ears, so that the refrain will be with me in the dark valley. Farewell, my love—my love. I sinned, but it was all for love—for love—of you,” and he tried to stretch out his arms to her, and then, with a faint smile, he sank back, and the spirit fled.

CHAPTER X.

FOUR years have stolen away, bearing with them a weight of joy and sorrow. Guy and Nancy have returned from the West Indies, and are living at the Manor.

All money difficulties have been removed from their path, as Arthur Lavendercombe has at length realised his long expected fortune, and has bestowed a very generous income on both of his daughters.

The old rooms echo with the glad voices of children; a sturdy boy of three, and a little demure maid of two, trot along the broad corridors, and round the old walled garden. The boy has his father's name; and the little

maid is called Prudence, after her who lies so peacefully in the old churchyard. They have not forgotten her. Her memory is still fresh in their hearts, and when the day is fading, and they sit under the old elm tree, her name is whispered forth with gentle reverence, and they ever recall some tender recollections of that beautiful holy life.

Hannah still lives at Hawthorn Cottage. The four years have aged her much, she moves slowly, and leaves the blinds and antimacassars to shift more for themselves. The little flower-stand still remains in the old place, and she never forgets to tend her dead sister's favourites.

She touches the flowers lovingly, and murmurs to herself—

“ You chose the better part, Prudence. I was troubled about many things, and I let the gracious, unselfish portion of life pass me by.”

There is one person who loves Hannah, and whom Hannah loves, the little maiden who bears that sweet, never-to-be-forgotten name. Little Prudence sits fearlessly on her great aunt's lap, and pats the hard wrinkled face, and prates to her in soft, baby language, until a smile breaks over the grim countenance, and the long fingers caress the golden curls.

Guy and Nancy are intensely happy. Nancy is her old, bright, joyous self, but the responsibilities of her new life have put a thoughtfulness into her face and manner, which was wanting before.

And Olive—what of her? The four years have borne away the first bitterness and misery of that terrible time, but those hours of anguish have left the mark of their heavy hand. There are silver threads mingling among the gold, and there is a look in the grey eyes, which makes one shudder for the

past suffering of which it speaks. But she is still beautiful, though her brow is lined, and her mouth compressed, as if curbing the violent emotion with which she has struggled.

No one knows of that awful night, excepting Mr. Jones, and he guards the secret faithfully. He has fulfilled Sir Eustace's trust, for he has been her great support and help through all the past years.

Olive clung to him in her sorrow with wild despair. It was his kindly words which soothed the first paroxysm of grief; his unselfish example which helped her to take courage and try to piece the broken fragments of her life together, and which has shown her the narrow path of self-denial and holiness.

If any one could fill Miss Prudence's place, Olive had done so. Wherever there was sorrow or pain, it was her hand which soothed

the suffering, her voice which comforted the broken-hearted.

Each day found her at Hawthorn Cottage ; she had not forgotten Miss Prudence's words, " Will you try and comfort Hannah when I am gone ? " She had tried to cheer the old lady's lonely hours, and in the fellowship of pain they had grown very near to one another.

They would sit together in the gloaming, and talk of that dear lost one, and Olive's face would become less sad, and Hannah's hard countenance would soften, and her voice grow almost sweet.

The Reverend Theophilus Shuffleout has been transplanted to another (let us hope a better) world, and Mr. Jones is now rector of Dinglehurst.

The ruined church has been restored, and the old glass (or what, alas ! was left of it) carefully pieced together. The slugs can no more hold carnival on the damp mouldy walls.

and the green moss has been ruthlessly dislodged from the arches. There is no longer any danger of being gathered to your ancestors by falling through the bottom of the pews, and, instead of the old table covered with a dirty red curtain, there is reared an altar worthy of the service of God.

It is June once more. The birds are singing their hearts out. The fair lush grasses are waving in the breeze, and the hawthorns are glorious in their sweet pink raiment.

There are three graves in the now neatly kept "God's Acre." Over one, the hawthorn bends lovingly, and beside it are two others, one small, and one large! At the head of the large one is a plain white cross, and upon it are traced the words,

EUSTACE DEVEREUX,

DIED MARCH 10TH, 18—

and below is written,

"Judge not that ye be not judged."

Mr. Jones is leaning over the Wych gate, gazing down on those three graves. He, too, has grown older, but years have dealt kindly with him. There is more firmness and strength in his face, and the dark eyes have gained a deeper tenderness.

He is thinking of the three who are lying there. Miss Prudence with her beautiful holy life, the little child taken in its innocence, and the man who had done that evil action.

On earth they rest side by side, and in heaven are they near to each other? The little child, and the holy woman, yes; but the other? Mr. Jones asked himself the question, and then as if in answer, his eyes strayed again to those words,

“Judge not that ye be not judged.”

It had been her wish to place those words there. Mr. Jones strove to stifle the sigh which would rise in his heart as he thought of the

terrible past, and then a sudden light illumined his face as he turned and beheld Olive coming towards him.

She had put off her black dress for the first time, and she was arrayed in a soft silvery grey, the perfume of spring seemed to hover round her, and her face had caught a little joyousness.

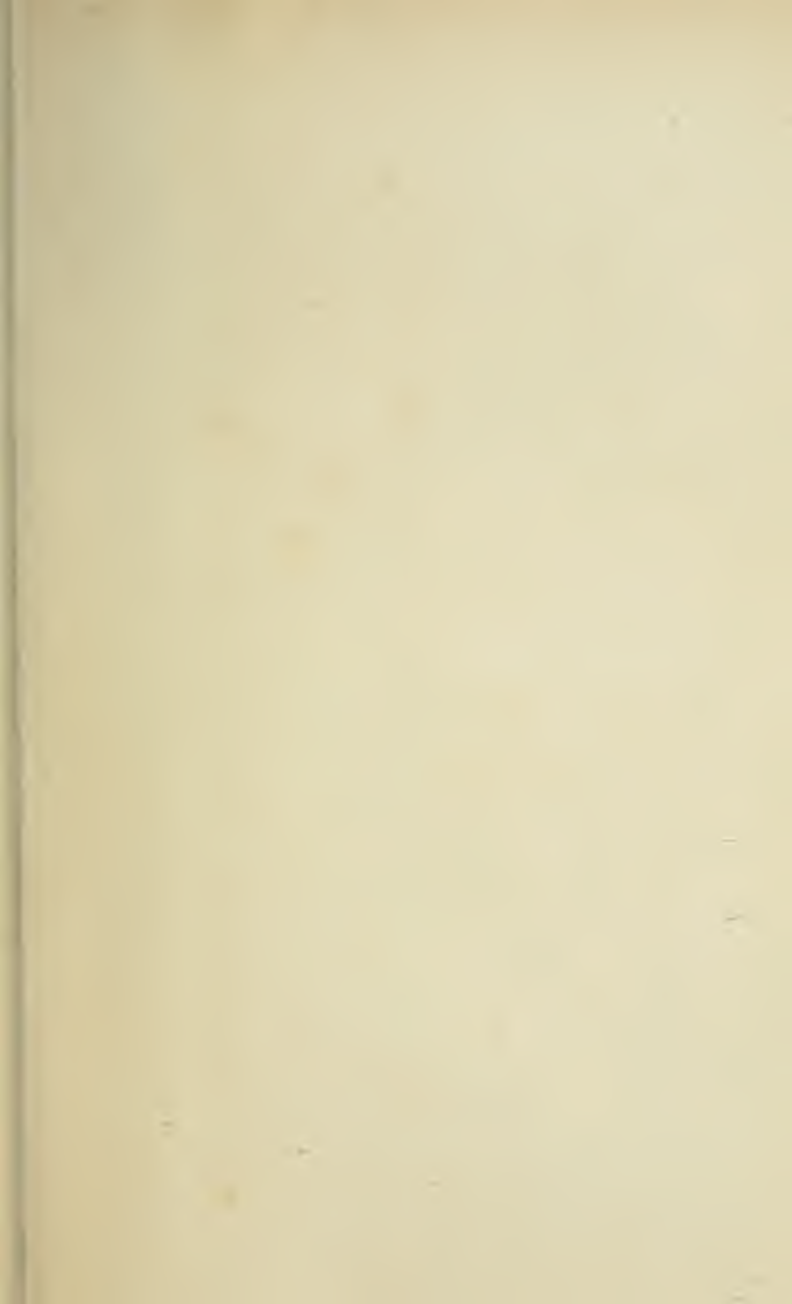
She stood silent by his side for a moment, and then she whispered, "I want to thank you for something to-day—something that I once railed at you for saving—my life. For months, years, the burden seemed too heavy to be borne, but—you have helped me, comforted me, and taught me that life, even when bowed in deepest anguish, is still blessed when it can be lived for others.

* * * * *

They wandered away under the pink hawthorns by the waving lush grasses and are lost to our view. Whether Mr. Jones' faithfulness

was ever rewarded by more than Olive's friendship the sun may know, or the birds singing their sweet hearts out may be able to tell you what happened in years to come, but from me—from me, the future is hidden.

FINIS.







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